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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

SIGNS OF CRISIS:
A SEMIOTIC APPROACH TO THE THEATER OF THE ABSURD

BY

ANITA DORCZAK

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

EDMONTON, ALBERTA
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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled SIGNS OF CRISIS: A SEMIOTIC APPROACH TO THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD submitted by ANITA DORCZAK in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Date November 10, 1989......

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my beloved father and mother who have given me strength and perseverance to continue over the years despite the time we have spent apart.

ABSTRACT

The dissertation presents a semiotic interpretation of selected plays of the Theater of the Absurd. "Pursuing the Absurd" focuses on the elucidation of the notion of the absurd in philosophy, sociology and linguistics. In particular, it traces the common themes of the Theater of the Absurd and existentialism. The second part of the chapter illustrates the contributions of the consummate iconoclasts: A. Jarry, G. Apollinaire, A. Artaud and S. I. Witkiewicz to the aesthetics of absurdity in drama.

"New Theater, New Approach" demonstrates the value of semiotics as a critical method. Thus, while the Theater of the Absurd remains opaque to conventional critical tools, the semiotic exegesis of absurdist plays enables us to appreciate their unique message which is primarily conveyed through the disruption of traditional forms of verbal exchange and visual presentation.

"Signs of Crisis" concentrates on a semiotic interpretation of selected plays by E. Ionesco, S. Beckett, C. Solórzano, S. Mrożek, J. Díaz, T. Różewicz, H. Pinter, and M. Pedrolo. The basic premise is that theater is communication which occurs by means of various signs and codes. A detailed analysis of signs, codes and the process of communication also serves to illustrate the various

metaphysical, social, philosophical and political concerns of the Theater of the Absurd.

Our pursuit of the absurd ends, characteristically, with a shortlived "recovery" which recaps the issues covered by the dissertation without pretending that these issues are or can be dealt with comprehensively.

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I. Pursuing the Absurd

1. Preface

The Theater of the Absurd has been most often analyzed in terms of its thematic considerations. The most important hallmark of the new set of attitudes is the belief that the basic assumptions of previous centuries have been swept away and, as a result, man has suddenly found himself at a metaphysical crossroads.

The new wave of philosophy of existentialism brought more despair as it rendered man's earthly existence meaningless and affirmed the certainty of death. In Antiquity, on the other hand, philosophy was the basis of independent thought and stressed the individuality of thinkers. Under Plato's and Aristotle's tutelage, philosophers delighted in the contemplation of the eternal and through _theoria_ were able to reach for knowledge and wisdom. At present, _theoria_ seems to have renounced its place in favor of practical knowledge, _praxis_, and the actual making of things, _techne_. Human life is oriented towards consumption and profit. Metaphysics has been buried. With its demise man has lost his confidence and integrity. Man is also unable to find solace in society. Sociology points out that man's insecurity and isolation have increased due to the lack of any definite system of values. Man is condemned to solitude. One would think that man could still attempt to externalize his loneliness by means of language. In this respect, he is bound to face yet another failure. Language fails him both as a means of communication and as a conveyor of metaphysical truths. Religious faith has faded away from the metaphysical scene leaving man cut off from his transcendental roots. The sense of disorientation and senselessness pervades many aspects of man's life.

The term "absurd" is not a novelty in the history of thought. It is interesting to note, however, how its denotative power has increased and permeated other areas of human life. Nowadays, the concept of the absurd is associated not only with philosophy but also with sociology and linguistics. "The Absurd in Philosophy: Initial Considerations" will trace the developments in philosophy leading to the popularity of the term in literature. It will also explore the common themes of the Theater of the Absurd and existentialism and the significance of the absurd in sociology and linguistics.

The following chapter will trace the developments in the realm of theater which led to the creation of the aesthetics of absurdity. The contributions of the consummate iconoclasts: A. Jarry, G. Apollinaire, A. Artaud and S. I. Witkiewicz will be discussed in a historical perspective. The revolution started by Jarry led to the 20th Century divorce of realism and the Western theater which culminated in the works of the Polish dramatist, S. I. Witkiewicz. All these authors dwelled on deformation, the departure from the mimetic principle, the emphasis on visual elements, the preoccupation with the lot of the individual and the experimentation with language. Thus the winding path through which the absurd entered the aesthetics of the theater will be delineated in "The Absurd in Drama: Historical Developments."

Having presented the theoretical and historical outline of the absurd and the theater it is necessary to focus on the methodology adopted in this thesis. The Theater of the Absurd has departed largely from the traditional dramatic matrix; consequently, the old critical tools have become outdated. The plays that will be discussed here pursue ends different from the conventional plays and thus use quite different techniques. The specificity of the Theater of the Absurd consists in the simultaneous presence of the visual and the auditory component. While this is true of other kinds of theater too, the aesthetics of the Theater of the Absurd makes the thematic approach to the absurd plays via logos no longer adequate. They can only be fully appreciated if they are analyzed in both their visual and auditory distortions. It must be stressed that meaning is created not only through words, but also through gestures, expression and the elements of decor. It is my thesis that the theater as a meaning creating system operates through a profusion of signs which enter various constellations to generate yet other possible combinations of meaning. The exegesis of the absurdist plays in this thesis will be conducted by means of semiotic tools. Consequently, the first part of Chapter II will focus on the specificity of theater semiotics to elaborate a working model for this study. The basic tenet will be that the theater is mutlimedial communication by means of various sign systems. I shall therefore analyze both the various signs and codes which constitute the theatrical text and the process of communication it engenders.

Chapter III illustrates the practical semiotic analyses of the plays of the Theater of the Absurd. The first part of "Signs of Crisis" will explore the significance of theatrical signs in the plays of E. Ionesco, A Guatemalan dramatist, C. Solórzano and, a Polish author, S. Mrożek. The second chapter will focus on the impact of theatrical codes on the interpretation of the plays of S. Beckett and T. Różewicz. The attention of the third chapter will concentrate on the breakdown of communication in the plays by S. Beckett, a Catalan writer, M. Pedrolo, H. Pinter, a Chilean dramatist, J. Díaz and E. Ionesco.

The Theater of the Absurd creates its meaning through a unique amalgam of visual and auditory signs unlike poetry and narrative, both of which rely on the medium of the word solely. Absurdity, philosophically speaking, is the experience of the metaphysical problems of splitting thought and reality. The absurdity of the human condition is conveyed through the collapse of systems of values and the crisis of language which in the Theater of the Absurd is captured as incommunicability. The following chapters will trace how the absurd emerged and developed in the domain of philosophy; how it was communicated by the aesthetic experimentation of the first iconoclasts and, finally, how it manifests itself through signs, codes and the distorted process of communication.

2. The Absurd in Philosophy: Initial Considerations

In common parlance "absurd" refers to the unreasonable, foolish or ridiculous. We talk about logical, legal, poetic, scientific or moral absurdity and we relate the various kinds to the particular context in which we discover them. The absurdity of different phenomena could depend on the diachronic perspective, i.e. on advances in various areas of human life. What seemed absurd a few centuries ago can nowadays be regarded as completely reasonable and wise and, similarly, what we consider normal at the present time may seem absurd to future generations. The Absurd in this sense is related to the state of knowledge and is conditioned by historical developments.

Originally, the term derives from the domain of music and denotes lack of harmony, but it has also domesticated itself in philosophy, literature, sociology, and linguistics. The term "absurdity" is most often associated with the philosophy of the 20th century. Modern philosophy offers a gloomy picture of man's predicament. It is a picture of man in search of a solid system of ethics; a man who is doomed to wander endlessly from nothingness to nothingness. While the Renaissance man was proud of his power, modern man has lost his integrity. This is not surprising, because the sensibility of our age has been influenced drastically by wars, revolutions, the rise of totalitarianism and the growing mechanization of life. These aspects of contemporary reality have hastened the advent of nihilism and alienation which grew to the proportions of neurotic obsession with the senselessness of human existence. The Absurd is undoubtedly connected with skepticism as both tend to present the dark side of the human condition and draw attention to man's inability to reason.

The first great skeptic, Georgias the Sophist, realizing the impotence of reason, claims that nothing really exists, and even if it existed it could not be known, and even if it could be known, it could not be communicated. Although the eminent orator formulated his thought in the 5th century B.C., it has been reflected in man's futile search for a solid system of ethics throughout the centuries. In the 16th century M. E. de Montaigne advanced the theory of skepticism which later influenced Descartes and Bacon. Montaigne claimed that man's experiences only convey information regarding the appearance of phenomena while the true nature of things remains incomprehensible. Thus we cast doubt upon man's pursuits in the areas of philosophy, theology and ethics and indicated the necessity to rely on faith as the only means of uncovering the truth. Montaigne's The Essays (1580) and "Apology for Raimond Sebond" had an enormous impact on the subsequent history of ideas.

The emphasis on the limitations of human faculties led to a growing interest in the self, "Apparently, the earliest use of the term 'solipsism' is attributable to an apostate Jesuit, G. C. Scotti, in a work of 1652 entitled La Monarchie des solipses, which depicts a kingdom of self-seekers. The work was a satire on the Jesuits, and for some time thereafter in France, Jesuits were subject to the epithet solipsistes."[1] Solipsism developed into two separate branches: the metaphysical and epistemological. The main tenet of metaphysical solipsism can be encapsulated in a short statement like "Self is the only reality" or "Only I exist." The essence of this kind of solipsism relates to experience as the only manner of questioning existence or non-existence of things. Therefore, existential assertations are limited to the existence of the experiencing self. The doctrine of metaphysical solipsism was introduced by Descartes in Meditations, and though many philosophers claimed that the doctrine was implausible, they were incapable of refuting cogito ergo sum.

The epistemological form of solipsism presents the self as the origin of knowledge of existence. It is based on the following thesis:

> First, that knowledge about existence and nonexistence of everything outside the self originates in immediate experience, or 'the given,' which is not strictly shared; and second, that to any given person, the intelligibility of existential claims originates in his own immediate experience.[2]

The fact that knowledge is conveyed to man in his immediate experience creates two problems: first of all, the presentation of any knowledge from one individual to another would require a special kind of language which would enable the other to understand the statement being made. Such a language, however, would call for the use of other pronouns than "I" and thus would result in meaninglessness of the whole exchange. This would lead to the second problem, the global decrease of meaningful communication among individuals creating a discord between meaningful attempts to communicate and the silence which frustrates or subverts those attempts.

The apparent futility of such endeavors resulted in a series of doubts about the capabilities of the human mind and the usefulness of knowledge, labelled under a common term: pessimism. "Pessimism" was coined by Coleridge in one of his 1795 letters, but as a term expressing a certain philosophical attitude, it became popular in the 19th century. Pessimism was strongly pronounced in the Romantic movement which focused on man's dissatisfaction with his predicament. First manifestations of the new spirit became evident in Die Nachtwachen des Bonaventura (The Vigils of Bonaventura) and, especially, in Goethe's Sorrows of Young Werther. Later the works of Byron, Lermontov, Kleist, Büchner and Leopardi developed Romantic ideas. Generally, pessimism is preoccupied with the existence of evil in all finite beings. It is said to manifest itself in many areas: psychology, religion, philosophy and history. Any discussion of pessimism must begin with a clear definition of good and evil. This is not an easy task though the basic principles of pessimism seem to flow from the same main stream: the fact that man is provided with more pain than pleasure.

The philosophical foundations of pessimism were laid by Arthur Schopenhauer. The key word in his system is the will-to-live. It is a continuous drive towards undefined goals accompanied by feelings of insatiability and helplessness. People strive for happiness yet it remains beyond their reach and a constant fear of death pervades their efforts. The only way to avoid suffering is to deny desires and needs through compassionate and ascetic life. Thus compassion on the one side, and contemplation on the other, are able to liberate man from the tyranny of the will. Schopenhauer regarded pain as a normal condition of man and considered even a slight relief from pain a great pleasure. Man is not meant to find solace in life due to the insatiable nature of his desires. This is therefore the worst of all possible worlds, since there is no good in it.

The most critical pessimist of the 19th century, Eduard Von Hartmann, ironically echoed Leibnizian optimism in holding that this is the best of all possible worlds, but he also maintained that evil preponderates over good, and it would be better if there were no world at all. Hartmann's main work, The Philosophy of the Unconscious (1869), was favourably received and became for a time more popular than Schopenhauer's works due to the changing cultural climate of the second part of the century. The intellectual mood of that period was influenced by industrial revolution, socialist ideas, colonialism and naturalism. Pessimism is evident in the works of Hawthorne and Melville, the late Dickens, Hardy, and other writers and poets of the period. The pessimistic trend culminated in the fin de siècle mood of decadence.

Since the 19th century, Western man has struggled to reconcile waning Christianity with the rising popularity of Darwinism. Pessimistic arguments about the omnipresence of evil became incompatible with the existence of God. These arguments resulted in the growing popularity of atheism. The first of the atheistic arguments is based on the eternity of matter; that is, the finding of physics that the quantity of matter has always been the same. The second argument is illustrated in holding that the existence of evil and other facts in the world excludes the possibility of the existence of God. Moreover, if God really existed, He would have given man clear evidence of His own existence.

Schopenhauer, Marx and Nietzsche were all atheists; that is, they maintained that there is no God and the phrase "God exists" expresses a false proposition. The influence of Schopenhauer upon Nietzsche is acknowledged by the latter in detail. Nietzsche concurred with Schopenhauer in holding that human life is dominated by pain, but he condemned Schopenhauer's insistence on resignation as the only way of liberating man from evil. Nietzsche substituted Schopenhauer's will to live by the concept of will to power. He held that the will to power is present in all areas of human activities, and in Zarathustra he argued that it is a basic motive of man's action. Moreover, Nietzsche insisted that life is meaningless unless man thrusts meaning into it. Thus man replaced God in Nietzsche's ethics; his superman asserts his goals, strives for perfection, raises himself above the meaningless flux of the everyday and becomes an antithesis to God, becomes a Creator himself. God, the highest value on which mankind depended, has come to its demise. This emphatic statement emphasizes man's extreme vulnerability which culminates in growing alienation and solitude. After Nietzsche our history is referred to as "the decline of the West" which is a far cry from the splendor of the previous cultures founded on Gods or belief in God.

Nietzsche criticized Christianity in The Antichrist (1888) "both as an illicit alternative to Jesus' way of life and as opposed to reason . . . . His most original criticism of Christianity is his attempt to show how from the very start resentment has been central in the so-called religion of love."[3] Personally, he renounced all religions. He thought that Jesus was like Prince Myshkin in Dostoyevsky's The Idiot, innocent and altruistic, but also pathological and misunderstood by the people surrounding him. Nietzsche's proclamation that "God is dead" and his ideas about the will to power and superman (an Übermensch) had an enormous influence on literature. His impact is manifested in the novels of Mann, Hesse, Malraux, Gide, in the dramas of Shaw and Yeats and in the poetry of Rilke. "Nietzsche was the first great philosopher--and still the only one--to make extensive use of the term 'nihilism'."[4]

The term "nihilism" was coined in Germany towards the end of the 18th century, popularized in 19th century Russia and was usually associated with Turgenev's novel, Fathers and Sons. The main character of the novel, Bazarov, came to embody all nihilistic interests: the preoccupation with a materialistic philosophy, the contempt for the establishment, the belief in reason, and the zealous urge for radical social changes. Nihilism denotes two distinct philosophical positions: "the doctrine that moral norms or standards cannot be justified by rational argument. On the other hand, it is widely used to denote a mood of despair over the emptiness or triviality of human existence."[5] Nihilism was initially associated with atheism. An atheist, unrestricted by any moral standards, was said to drift toward selfishness, despair and eventually toward suicide. In the modern era, nihilism is dissociated from atheism and is believed to be a result of social pressures and industrialization. The impact of these pressures does not necessarily lead to suicide in its extremity, but enhances the alienation of modern man and causes him to adopt an attitude of ironic detachment. Such a prototype in literature is illustrated by the hero of Kafka's The Trial.

Coexistence of elements of pessimism, nihilism, skepticism and solipsism finds its final expression in existentialism. The key theses in the existential philosophy are "the individual and systems; intentionality; being and absurdity; the nature and significance of choice; the role of extreme experiences; and the nature of communication."[6] (emphasis mine). The antecedents of existentialism can be traced back to the great 17th century philosopher, mathematician and physicist, B. Pascal. His two most important philosophical works are Pensées (1657) and De l'Esprit géométrique (1659). The latter work radiates a deep sense of skepticism over man's inability to prove first principles. Pascal suggests that skepticism can be overcome by faith and belief in revelation as the only method of gaining the truth. Although Pascal's views do not form a coherent philosophical system, "in recent years Pascal has been studied seriously by existentialists because of his brilliant portrayal of the human condition, and he has often been compared with Kierkegaard, especially in terms of his antiphilosophical and fideistic statement of Christianity."[7]

S. Kierkegaard followed Pascal in pointing out the antimony between the finite nature of man and the infinite nature of God. He stressed the concepts of the individual, of choice, of despair and of paradox, and he emphasized the temporariness of human existence, which is the source of choice, whereby the choice could not be based on any criteria because if a criterion decides what man chooses it is not really the man who makes the choice. The philosopher claimed that "the individual constitutes himself as the individual he is through his choice of one mode of existence rather than another. Christianity is not a phase in the total development of man's religious and moral ideas; it is a matter of choosing to accept or to reject God's Word."[8] In Either/Or: A Fragment of Life (1843), Kierkegaard further elaborated the doctrine of choice. He distinguished between the aesthetic and the ethical ways of life; the aesthetic one gravitates toward hedonistic ideals while the ethical one relates to pursuance of rules and fulfilment of duties. Man was afforded one more choice: the religious one which implies that God is obeyed. Eventually, man has to choose through the experience of despair springing from the necessity to confront the emptiness of life and the fear of nothingness. Thus, three main themes of existentialism originate from Kierkegaard's writings: the nature and significance of choice, the individual and systems, and the anguish at the finite nature of human existence.

In contrast to Kierkegaard, M. Heidegger did not ponder the dilemma over the temporariness of human life in light of permanence of God, but emphasized the fact that human existence is destined for death which plunges man into Nothingness. Nothingness is understood in a twofold manner: first, nothingness is the gap between man and the world and, second, it is the evaporation of object, from the world. The first understanding springs from an epistemological awareness of nothingness, while the other refers to man's emotional approach to the distinction of thought and object. Heidegger's main philosophical work, Sein und Zeit (1927), focuses on the quest for being which is characterized by three main aspects: facticity, existentiality and forfeiture. Facticity refers to the fact that man is cast into the world not out of his own will. Existentiality denotes understanding of the world and the fusion of being and the world. Forfeiture stresses the inauthentic existence of being due to its life for others. Dread, the dominant mood created by petty everydayness, awakens conscience which stimulates man to fight for his freedom. Heidegger asserts that man is "thrown into being" and proceeds from Nothingness to

Nothingness in a search for a satisfactory system of ethics. In his wanderings, man is influenced by other people who gradually deprive him of his authenticity. Only in courage to face the inevitability of death, man finds his dignity. Thus, "the dominant theme of Being and Time remains the vision of the lonely will driven by dread to face the prospect of its own dissolution, in retrospect its guilt, and yet to realize in this twin terror its proper function."[9]

Although Heidegger is often regarded as a central figure in existentialist thought, J. P. Sartre weaves together the threads of its early phase into a complete existentialist pattern. Just as Heideggerian man is "thrown into being," Sartian man is cast into a situation which demands an immediate decision on his part. Man is free to choose, but he has to bear the responsibility for his decisions. Essentially, his freedom becomes the source of his anguish. J. P. Sartre Formulated his philosophy in L'être et le néant (1943), where he distinguished between "être en soi" and "être pour soi." "Être en soi" is prior to "être pour soi"; in other words, existence precedes essence.

"Être en soi" is completely gratuitous, without any reason; it is independent of thought. Real being is meaningless. It is human consciousness of the things which thrusts meaning into it. So, if there is to be a thought of an object, the existence of the object has to precede the thought; in other words, existence precedes essence. Even though Sartre attempted to escape the old dualism of Descartes, Locke and Kant, the dualism between thought and reality, or essence and existence, reappears in L'être et le néant as the dichotomy of "être en soi" and "être pour soi."

The other basic category in Sartre's system, "la mauvaise foi," "consists in pretending to ourselves and others that things could not be otherwise, that we are bound to our way of life, and that we could not escape it even if we wanted to."[10] People exhibit their "bad faith" in relations with other people (the Other). Each person can play a double role: the role of object or subject. As an object the person can dominate the Other, be supportive of or antagonistic to him, etc. The absurd element surges to the forefront when men are aware of their human nature yet they attempt to become a thing. What seems to be lacking from Sartre's system is the justification for man's motivation: values are provisional and must constantly be reaffirmed. Since man is free at every moment and in every situation, he gains his identity through the act of deciding.

Besides being a professional philosopher, Sartre was also a novelist, a dramatist and a critic. For Sartre, as for Unamuno and Camus, literature becomes a vehicle for the expression of his philosophical ideas. It is important to realize that many philosophers of the Absurd were also writers, playwrights or novelists. Other existentialists, M. Heidegger and K. Jaspers, also gravitated towards literature, e.g. Heidegger wrote and interpreted poetry while Jaspers formulated a theory of tragedy in Von der Wahrheit (1959). S. I. Witkiewicz was not only a dramatist and a novelist but also a philosopher who sought the application of his philosophical tenets in his literary output. The philosopher and the artist can found a theory with different objectives yet remain within a scope of common concerns; "The two terms aesthetics and critical theory (or theory of literature) identify the two activities, the first looking from philosophy toward art, the second from art toward philosophy."[11] Furthermore, T. McFarland in Interrelations of Literature argues that

> A theory of aesthetics is characteristically generated by the need to relate artistic activity to a general theory of cognition and/or nature so an aesthetician can relate art to other areas of philosophical preoccupation.[12]

Although some writers, as H. G. Blocker, claim that literature and philosophy are different forms of writing, others, as H. Piñera and S. H. Olsen assert that literature and philosophy are "neighbors in the same important area of a culture" and they "meet in thematic concepts."[13] H. G. Blocker regards literature and philosophy as fundamentally different forms of discourse, "the most pronounced difference being the portrayal of concrete individuals in a specific setting in literature as contrasted with the abstract conceptual framework of philosophical writing."[14] H. Piñera presents philosophy and literature as "dos maneras diferentes de expresión de la única realidad a la cual tiene acceso el hombre," and though "el filósofo se interesa por la esencia de las cosas" if we assume that

> la filosofía no es análisis, sino descripción, con toda probalidad estamos ya en el camino que pueda conducir al descubrimiento de que filosofía y literatura son como el anverso y el reverso de una misma realidad.[15]

S. H. Olsen organized his ideas about philosophy and literature according to a similar matrix; that is, he also asserts that philosophy and literature share many elements from the areas of common human experience. In "Thematic Concepts: Where Philosophy Meets Literature," he distinguishes topical thematic concepts which "define problems and issues of interest to a group of people (a society, a class, a religious group, etc.) for a certain period: and perennial thematic concepts.[16] The latter ones deal with mortal questions which, in turn, are "concerned with 'mortal life: how to understand it and how to live it.' They are permanent foci of interest in a culture because they are unavoidable . . . . They identify the culture . . . "[17] Furthermore, the author suggests that perennial thematic concepts are typically philosophical or theological concepts if one understands both terms broadly. Consequently, he points out a special connection between literature and philosophy, and literature and religion:

> And looking at the important position literature occupies among the values of our culture, it is unsurprising that literature should work with themes which are central also to spiritual

> activities with much the same cultural importance as literature. And with regard to the contrast between topical and perennial thematic concepts, the special connection between literature and philosophy/religious practice, mediated through perennial thematic concepts, explains how an interpretation employing perennial thematic concepts defines a richer and more rewarding experience of a work than one employing merely topical thematic concepts, and in what sense a literary work which yields to analysis in perennial thematic concepts has a deeper and more universal interest than a work which can only be interpreted by help of topical thematic concepts.[18]

The only distinction that Olsen draws deals with the fact that philosophy is concerned with issues defined through thematic concepts and philosophical discourse describes the reality to which these concepts refer. Literature, on the other hand, is concerned with the application of thematic concepts to a particular work only, not to any further reality, and it offers an imaginative rather than discursive realm of interpretation. Thus, literature and philosophy meet by means of thematic concepts, though they still maintain some distinct characteristics.

The analysis of the relationship between philosophy and literature is like an inspection of farm land that has been seeded. Until the crop begins to grow, it is impossible to predict exactly what the harvest will be like. The seeds of the "philosophy of Nothingness" have found a fertile soil in the field of the Theater of the Absurd. The Theater of the Absurd may be able to perform a function which philosophy no longer seems to be performing. That is to say, the theater might help us to understand our predicament and become the aide-à-vivre philosophy once gave us. Philosophical ideas are often articulated more lucidly in a play than in a philosophical discourse and the revelation of them should not diminish the aesthetic enjoyment but result in a richer appreciation of it. If philosophy is to be regarded as a relation of thought to reality,[19] it becomes clear that the absurdist concern with the separation of thought and reality is basically philosophical. Thus absurdity arises as a result of the perception of the divorce between existence and essence; "in short, we can't think existence, but knowing that we can't makes us aware that there is existence beyond the reach of thought, and as Sartre goes on to show in La Nausée, while we can't think existence, we can experience it in moments of "nausea."[20] Sartre presented his first formulation of existentialism in his novel La Nausée (1938) and developed it in his plays Les Mouches (1943) and Huis clos (1944). Sartre argues that the main task of the theater should be the presentation of characters in the process of "becoming," because man creates himself through making his choice. The theater of Sartre is the theater of situation in which, in contrast to the Theater of the Absurd, the characters are still well delineated, dialogue is brilliant and plot logical.

It was Camus who turned out to be the most influential writer for the Theater of the Absurd. He formulated his philosophical doctrine in the collection of essays entitled a novelty in the history of thought, but Camus's answer to its challenge is unique. Camus contends, after Descartes, that the world can be apprehended only through our senses. What comes ad oculus immediately is a fundamental contradiction between the world as one perceives it and the conception one has always had of it. The world offers no explanation and remains hostile and indifferent to man's attempts at comprehension:

> Ce monde en lui-même n'est pas raisonnable, c'est tout ce qu'on en peut dire. Mais ce qui est absurde, c'est la confrontation de cet irrationel et de ce désir éperdu de clarté dont l'appel rêsonne au plus profond de l'homme. L'absurde depend autant de l'homme que du monde.[21]

Le Mythe opens with a discussion of the significance of suicide, "Il n'y a qu'un problème philosophique vraiment sérieux: c'est le suicide."[22] There are but two ways to eliminate the basic dilemma of man's existence: either the subject or the object has to be removed. The first escape means a literal suicide: to kill oneself is simply to avoid the problem of how to live with the absurd. To believe in an imperceptible unity, on the other hand, is to pretend that the problem does not exist. Man will never find a solution if he indulges in liquor and drugs to dull consciousness. Man is bound to rebel.

Revolt, along with the Absurd, constitutes the core of Camus's philosophy. Only through revolt man can affirm his dignity. Even though he knows that he is fighting windmills, dignity. Even though he knows that he is fighting windmills, revolt could be the only response to the mockery of fate. Man has to wring from each moment as much as it yields and live as many moments as he can since the realization of death renders each moment precious. Camus is saying that in order to live the best possible life, man has to be conscious of the absurd at all times. He describes Sisyphus' triumph as he watches his rock fall down the hill, knowing that he will have to roll it up again and that it will roll down right back, ad infinitum, "Sisyphe, prolétaire des dieux, impuissant et révolté, connaît toute l'éntendue de sa misérable condition: c'est à elle qu'il pense pendant sa descente. La clairvoyance qui devait faire son tourment consomme du même coup sa victoire."[23] Thus man derives his dignity from perseverance in his tasks and acceptance of his fate although the world offers no encouragement for him. For Camus, as for Sartre, literature was a vehicle for the presentation of his philosophical ideas. Particulary, L'Etranger, published four years after La Nausée, has become a classic example of the literature of the Absurd. But the theater of Camus, like the theater of Sartre, is still conventional in terms of technique, characterization and idiom. The rebelliousness of spirit, on the other hand, permeates throughout the thematic aspect of his plays.

The loss of faith in God yields despair over the emptiness of life which leads to growing indifference and correlation between the death of God and the disintegration of love in Western civilization, "Love is possible only when two persons communicate with each other from the centre of their existence . . . Only in this 'central experience' is human reality, only here is aliveness, only here is the basis of love."[24] Devaluation of love becomes clearly associated with the loss of religious faith. "Just as automatons cannot love each other they cannot love God. The disintegration of the love of God has reached the same proportions as the disintegration of the love of man."[25] In other words, man has been denied the possibility of ever achieving a genuine love experience.

Existentialism emerged as the most fecund philosophy in the domain of the Absurd. Absurdity, nourished by philosophical sources, domesticated itself in the realm of the theater in the 1950s. M. Esslin applied the current philosophical term to drama and created a highly successful catch-phrase, "the Theater of the Absurd." The Theater of the Absurd is one of the ways of facing up to a universe that has become devoid of meaning. On the one hand, it criticizes the pettiness and complacency of society and, on the other, it presents man confronted with basic choices he has to make to maintain his existence. Viewed from this perspective, the Theater of the Absurd exhibits universality in its concern with the gloomy side of man's predicament. The Penguin

Dictionary of Theater (1966) offers the following definition of the Theater of the Absurd:

> Absurd, Theater of the. Term applied to a group of dramatists in the 1950's who did not regard themselves as a school, but who all seemed to share certain attitudes towards the predicament of man in the universe, essentially those summarized by A. Camus in his essay The Myth of Sisyphus. This diagnoses humanity's plight as purposelessness in an existence out of harmony with its surroundings (absurd literally means out of harmony). Awareness of this lack of purpose in all we do . . . produces a state of metaphysical anguish which is the central theme of the writers in the Theater of the Absurd . . .[26]

Both Esslin and Taylor emphasize the influence of Camus on the philosophical foundation of the Theater of the Absurd which, again, makes us aware of how fertile the seeds of existentialism turned out to be in the field of the theater. The Theater of the Absurd illustrates how man's attempt to define the nature of his existence only proves the collapse of Reason and infuses man with intellectual atrophy and moral apathy. Man is confronted with a metaphysical world in which only death is certain. Therefore the themes of death, vigil and isolation tend to dominate the topical matrix of the dramatists of the Absurd.

Man is presented as not only unable to grasp the meaning of his own existence, but also as an unsuccessful social creature. Beginning with the argument that social order is the product of human construction, the authors of A Sociology of the Absurd introduce a unique perspective on conventional sociology when they define it as the Sociology of the Absurd. They argue that

> The term 'absurd' captured the fundamental assumption of this new wave: The world is essentially without meaning. In contrast to that sociology which seeks to discover the real meaning of action--a sociological reality, such as the functional meaning of social behavior--this new sociology asserts that all systems of belief, including that of the conventional sociologists, are arbitrary.[27]

What follows from the assertion that "all systems of belief are arbitrary" is a natural insecurity and alienation as fundamental conditions of human life. The sociology of the Absurd regards society as a set of elements which does not have a stable and definite meaning. Functionalism, on the other hand, assumes that the world is determined and human beings are only parts of an elaborate design. The Absurd insists that human beings influence their existence and actively control an existential continuum between freedom and determinism. Such an understanding of the position of man in the world leads to two basic consequences: firstly, it implies that the Absurd focuses on man's inner life, his consciousness and freedom as he feels it and, secondly, it emphasizes the lack of a definite system of values which are "pluralistically applicable on the basis of situations, persons and times."[28]

The philosophical basis of the Sociology of the Absurd derives from existentialism and phenomenology. Phenomenology stresses subjective meaning, intentionality and consciousness. All these aspects are related to a sense of human identity and the ability to maintain it in various social interactions. From existentialism, the Sociology of the Absurd adopts the basic tenets regarding the friction between man's quest for meaning and the meaninglessness of the surrounding world. Thus man is regarded as a creature who has to struggle to thrust meaning into every single moment of his journey through the maze of social convention.

Man's journey through life is not facilitated by the use of language. F. Rossi-Landi in his article "On Absurdity" claims that language per se contributes to the creation of absurdity though

> it is not always clear, and sometimes it is very unclear, whether the absurdity (or nonsense) referred to belongs to the sentence, to the proposition expressed by that sentence, to the situation that proposition is about, to some features of the situation in which the proposition is being expressed, or to the manner in which we approach one of the above items.[29]

He distinguishes several types of absurdity. One example of it is "unknown words and their combinations" or "odd combinations of words." Absurdity is also inherent in "illegitimate or spurious combinations of words" and "self-effacing combinations of words." Moreover, absurdity may spring from "strangeness in the thing reported or spoken about." In conclusion, Rossi-Landi stresses the fact that absurdity is dependent on the general conception of the world held by the author of the sentence.

Man's failure to become a successful social creature is related to the devaluation of language, which is another leading theme in the Theater of the Absurd. Language used to be at the core of the traditional theatrical performance. In the nineteenth century drama, it was the most active system, but its significance on stage has been diminishing ever since. In modern avant-garde theater, linguistic signs are often abandoned, e.g. in the experimental "Laboratory Theater" of J. Grotowski. Language itself is a living phenomenon and is constantly exposed to numerous influences which alter the meaning of words and may widen the gap between language and reality. The mass-media and advertising, with the abundant use of euphemisms and superlatives, contribute to the process of language devaluation. I. Even-Zohar refers to this process in his article on depletion, in which he lists its instances in everyday phrases and formulae, qualifying adverbs, dead metaphors, slang and void pragmatic connectives (e.g. "well," "so," "I mean,") etc.[30] In totalitarian countries, language is subject to propaganda and double talk obliterates the real meaning of the world. Although, on the one hand, we witness the global increase of communication, the growing specialization in various professions leads to the formulation of specific jargons and, as a result, limits the possibilities of exchanging ideas among professional groups. It may be argued, then, that the possibilities of communication among people have diminished on a global scale.

The Theater of the Absurd is concerned with the presentation of the phenomenon of the breakdown of communication. Absurdity, then, may also be regarded as incommunicability, with an emphasis on the devaluation of language as a medium for communication of metaphysical truths. Absurdity, in this context, would be most fully expressed by total silence and, interesting enough, the tendency towards silence is quite distinctly pronounced in the plays of the Absurd. The characters desperately strive to continue their talking but it inevitably changes into incoherent babblings which preclude the establishment of any contact. H. Piñera in the chapter on "Ortega y Gasset: tres cuestiones literarias" also emphasizes that language "es siempre habla, es decir, uno de los modos de manifestarse la degradación y, tambíen, la inautenticidad del ser humano, pues su autencidad sólo puede consister en el silencio."[31] Thus only silence allows man to attain his authenticity; the phenomenon captured a long time ago by M. Heidegger. Everydayness invites "el 'juego del lenguaje,' es a convencionalidad dentro de la cual, de acuerdo con las 'reglas del juego,' es posible entenderse con vistas a un fin predeterminado, y sólo esto."[32] Man may create an illusion of authentic existence through the use of language, but, most often, language is reduced to the level of a game in which characters engage with no particular purpose.

The modern world emerges as an existential nightmare, abandoned by Reason and hope, in which philosophy and science threaten man with a void as the universal Ultimate offered to man. The theorists of the philosophy of Nothingness have taken two different paths:

> All the major existentialist philosophers have written systematic treatises. But they have also made large contributions to imaginative literature, and the content of existentialist philosophy makes it clear that dramatic dialogue, whether in plays or in the novel, is probably a form of expression more consistent with the author's intentions than deductive argument would be[33] (emphasis mine).

The Theater of the Absurd and existentialism meet in their key themes: in the confrontation between the "individual and systems, intentionality and the significance of choice"; in the disintegration of the self evident in the theme of "being and absurdity," and, finally, in the nature of communication which, in the Theater of the Absurd, is captured as incommunicability.

3. The Absurd in Drama: Historical Developments

The aesthetics of the Theater of the Absurd was created long before the acclaimed debut of En Attendant Godot. The traditional bourgeois theater was dominated by a photographic imitation of life enclosed in a box of a room with one wall removed for the audience to peek in. Dialogue, conventionally, the dominant element in drama, conveyed the plot and the information about characters. Yet, even in the nineteenth century, there was a clear trend toward anti-mimetic dramatic expression in the works of Tieck, Kleist, and Büchner. Büchner's drama Woyzeck (1837) depicts the character overwhelmed by fears and tormented by the phantoms of his hallucinations. "In the grotesque nightmare figures that torture the helpless Woyzeck (above all the doctor who subjects him to scientific experiments), and in the violence and extravangance of its language," writes Esslin, "Woyzeck is one of the first modern plays--the gem of much of Brecht, German Expressionism . . ."[34]

The emergence of German Expressionism was preceded by interesting developments in Russia. V. Bryusov inaugurated the movement against naturalism in the Russian theater in his article "Unnecessary Truth," which appeared in the World of Art in 1902. Bryusov condemned the reproduction of reality. The ultimate goal of all art was the communication of the experiences of the soul. The actor was regarded as a creative artist who, on the basis of both script and setting, was to stimulate the imagination of the audience. His ideas were utilized by V. Meyerhold who was dissatisfied with Stanislavski's theory of psychological realism in the theater.

The writings of Nietzsche and Wagner inspired V. Ivanov and F. Sologub, who began to advocate a theater of spiritual ecstasy and mass participation. Ivanov insisted on the use of the mask and Sologub claimed that only if actors play like marionettes can the vision of the playwright reach the audience. Moreover, the action of tragedy was to be accompanied by music and dance.

The most successful experimental dramatist of the period (1900-1914) was L. Andreyev

> whose Life of Man was produced in 1907 by both Meyerhold and Stanislavski . . . He proposes a new theater of "panpsyche" which will renounce the action and spectacle that has always characterized the drama, along with such themes as hunger, ambition, or love. It will turn inward to focus upon human thought, with all its suffering, joys, and struggles. Instead of external action, it will depict 'the quiet and external immobility of living experience.'[35]

Andreyev's "Letter in the Theater" (1913) illustrates a clear anti-realist trend dominant in the experimental theater of the period. Yet another theorist, N. Evreinov, claimed that the theater should not be approached in terms of "dramatic literature" because it is simply an amalgam of acting, staging, drama and audience. He presented his theory in "An Apology for Theatricality" where he emphasized that realism and symbolism stifle the true spirit of the theater. Evreinov asserted that:

> Theatricality is one of man's basic instincts; it existed before any aesthetic sense developed. All other arts, developed from theater, are based upon formation, while theater is based upon the "more primitive, easier to realize" goal of transformation. The basis of theater is not religion, dance, or any other art, but the desire to change, to be something other than oneself . . .[36]

Similar experimental movements were launched in other European countries. They were particularly evident in Swiss dadaism and German expressionism. T. Tzara in "Le dadisme et le théâtre" renounced realism in the theater and stressed grotesque means of expression as most appropriate. One of the fathers of expressionism, O. Kokoshka had one of his iconoclastic plays performed at a dada soirée in Zurich, on April 14, 1917. German expressionism also rejected naturalism and, instead, praised subjectivity and distortion. From Strindberg the expressionists developed their interest in man's inner world. E. Toller wanted to renew the "spiritual content of human society."[37] G. Kaiser, the most significant expressionist playwright, regarded drama as an intellectual forum which develops man's ability to think. He claimed that the dramatist "must show his fellow men the purpose of being, which is 'the attainment of record achievements' moving always toward a more comprehensive vision of reality."[38]

Another approach to the theater was developed by E. Piscator who argued that drama should be made to serve the proletarian audience and actors should become political beings who would present their material in the style of a Lenin's manifesto. Similarly, for B. Brecht the theater was social and political medium. Brecht developed an epic theater which clearly rejected illusion and representation in favor of showing. His theater, with a didactic-revolutionary purpose, was addressed to reason instead of empathy. Actors were to play from memory quoting gestures and attitudes. He deliberately destroyed the conventional dramatic structure in order to create an effect of *verfremdung* (alienation) through which the audience was to acquire knowledge and pleasure from critical awareness of social causes.

Although all the above-mentioned tendencies in the 20th century drama questioned the realistic conventions in the theater, they stopped short of developing a Theater of the Absurd.

A new vision of drama was dawning in the *fin-de-siècle* climate of uncertainty and nihilism in France. The attention of this chapter will focus on the essential avant-garde principles of deformation and disfiguration which anticipated the advent of absurdist aesthetics. The first attempt to breach the wall of complacency of Bouvards and Pécuchets was delivered by a young *poète maudit*, A. Jarry, in *Ubu roi* (1896). Nearly twenty years later some of the verb of *Ubu* reappeared in G. Apollinaire's *Les mamelles de Tirésias* (1917). Yet another Frenchman, A. Artaud, continued the aesthetic vein established by A. Jarry and G. Apollinaire in *Le théâtre et son double* (1938). Finally, the modern trends in painting and the Theater of the Absurd meet in the oeuvre of S. I. Witkiewicz, "one of the most brilliant figures of the European avant-garde of his time, whose importance is only now being discovered outside his native Poland."[39]

The artistic experimentation of Jarry, Artaud, Apollinaire and Witkiewicz concentrated on the departure from the representational forms of theater and on the breach of prevailing naturalistic conventions. These dramatists delighted in the disruption of theatrical conventions and traditional dramatic techniques. Their impact was most strongly pronounced in the radical modernization of dramatic language. They advocated the abandonment of the reverence for the word and, in turn, emphasized non-verbal means of expression. The traditional concept of character also acquired a different dimension in their plays. Their dramatis personae were devoid of psychological motivation for their actions and appeared depersonalized and dehumanized. Such a presentation of the character was in tune with the period when the individual was believed to be disappearing under the influence of the masses. These iconoclasts tended to disregard the distinction between the tragic and the comic. The constant blurring of the boundaries between these two genres became one of the fundamental devices in the Theater of the Absurd. Humor also appeared as a major disruptive device in the absurdist plays of the 1950s and 1960s. The propensity to parody, distortion and disjunction evident in the dramatic creations of Jarry, Apollinaire, Artaud and Witkiewicz laid the foundation for the subversive aesthetics of the Theater of the Absurd.

The first direct precursor of the Theater of the Absurd, A. Jarry, budded artistically in the atmosphere of the Parisian Boheme. His short play, Ubu roi, initiated the great dispute about realism in the theater. Under Mallarmé's influence, Jarry insisted on a definite divorce of Realism and Art. His theories initiated a stream of changes to follow in surrealist and Dada writings. In "Questions de théâtre,"[40] Jarry asserted that Art was beyond the concept of time. According to him, historical plays do not have much significance, because they deal with a particular period, whereas true Art should aim at eternal values. Jarry strives for universality by placing the action in "nowhere." All the events happen in Poland, which to say nowhere, because at that time, Poland was partitioned among Russia, Prussia and Austria, and was indeed non-existent in a political and geographical sense. Ubu embodies everything gross and repugnant; in other words, he incarnates bourgeois smugness and narrow-mindedness. In the company of his bowler and stick Ubu emerges as a typical representative of the bourgeoisie.

The grotesqueness of Ubu's character is an abrupt breach of naturalistic conventions. Jarry insisted on the use of masks in order to achieve a more universal appeal. The actors, in Jarry's opinion, should not have any freedom of interpretation, but act and move like puppets. In fact, Jarry advocated the use of encasing the whole body and reduction of movements to six basic positions of marionettes.

Particularly, his concept of depersonalization of the performers, standing in sharp contrast to the trends of his time, has become fruitful for future theater practice. Jarry provided very few stage directions and deliberately simplified the decor believing that the set should stir the imagination of the audience. The decor was a "hybrid" in order to evoke various connotations in the spectators and to force them to imagine Everywhere. Both time and space were used with extreme fantasy and freedom. Jarryesque themes of violence, repulsiveness and "shite" as well as his innovative technique placed him outside the mainstream of Western thought.

The most daring of Jarry's experiments derive from the domain of language. The language of Ubu is divorced from classical rhetoric. The opening line with merdre was a slap in the bourgeois face: this deliberate assault hurled by the young Boheme was meant as a castigation to the audience. Jarryesque provocative vocabulary is based on the use of obscene words as well as extraordinary neologisms. The world which created "much ado":

> Merdre est représenté dans UR par 33 occurences, 25 d'entre elles sont le fait du père Ubu, 7 viennent de la mère Ubu . . . Les contextes situationnels de merdre sont assez variés, comme le sont ceux de son étymon dans la langue naturelle: merdre s'accomode en effet aussi bien de la satisfaction . . . , de l'agacement . . . , de la colère, de l'inquiétude.[41]

There have been numerous debates among the linguists upon the reason of the "r"'s insertion in the word, "Plusiers lecteurs insistent sur la volonté de scandale manifestée tant par la déformation graphique que par la position du mot a l'initiale absolue."[42] The most convincing interpretations emphasize that "l'insertion de l'-r-repond à un souci d'expressivité."[43] Despite the distortion the word acquired a new sonoric quality which undoubtedly enhanced its expressiveness. This is an example of Jarry's exploration in the world of sounds. Merdre carries comic overtones when it refers to the culinary context. The Ubus give a party and treat the guests to such specialties as "Jerusalem fartichokes" and "cauliflower à la shite." Ubu has an extraordinary eating habit:

> Pere Ubu: Eh bien! Capitaine, avez-vous bien diné?
> Capitaine Bordure: Fort bien, monsieur, sauf la merdre.
> Pere Ubu: Eh! La merdre n'etait pas mauvaise.
> Mere Ubu: Chacun a son gout.[44]

Ubu does not seem to be adversely affected by this unusual diet. The language of Ubu abounds in neologisms and archaisms; there occur pleonasms and word games. Taken as a whole, the language of Ubu is coarse, pithy and shocking; and as such, it creates the first step towards radical modernization of dramatic language.

Jarry's aesthetics are basically comedic and his bawdy sense of humour reminds of Rabelaisian creations. His preoccupation with misanthropy is reminiscent of Swift and his scathing condemnation of the pettiness of bourgeois life echoes Flaubert's attitude in Bouvard et Pécuchet. Jarry also refers to well known classics in order to use them for parody. In the propensity to parody Jarry anticipates the future trends of the Theater of the Absurd. In Ubu roi the references to Macbeth are most obvious. As C. Schumacher rightly points out, Shakespeare depicts

> the relentless movement of the wheel of fortune: man, through ambition, climbs to the top, but in the process overreaches himself, and no sooner has he attained the summit than inexorably he begins to fall.[45]

Macbeth kills Duncan, becomes a king, and is killed in his own turn, but, is motivated by ambition (as an honorable warrior should be) while Ubu is completely devoid of ambition and is driven by greed and egotism. In Ubu's grotesque murder of King Venceslas Jarry violated Judeo-Christian humanism according to which the murder of the hero is supposed to have profound consequences on both the course of action and the characters' psyche. In Ubu the tragedy is turned into farce by juxtaposition and distortion of various elements, for example, by "downgrading the horrific to the level of the ludicrous."[46] Thus, Jarry's experiments contribute to the development of modern tragicomedy which has become a reigning genre in the Theater of the Absurd.

Ubu roi, originally intended to poke fun at one of the teachers at Jarry's lycée, attained the proportions of a Declaration of Rights for the Absurdists. This short play represents the most abrupt breach of classical conventions; for example, Jarry starts ostensibly in medias res. The structure of the play is loose and "high" and "low" elements are constantly mixed. The most blatant disregard of

Aristotle's dicta is evident in Jarry's concept of the hero. Ubu is a complete villain, the embodiment of the modern bourgeois whose motivation is gut and pocket. Jarry also rejects the concept of catharsis; his aim is rather to make the public aware of bourgeois complacency, hypocrisy, money-mindedness and lust for power. Jarry's originality is also clear in the concept of decor. He simplified the set to widen the perception of the audience. He believed that the less explicit the decor the more active the imagination of the spectators which leads to a variety of interpretations.

Jarry's play transgresses the frontier of the rational. It controverts practically all the corner stones of the traditional theater. Classical conventions are obfuscated and ideological presuppositions melt. By his bizarre creation Jarry conveys his deep disgust with aesthetics, politics and ethics and envisions the menace of the world tyrannized by mechanization and senseless wars. In Ubu Jarry created a monster who crept onto stage and has haunted man with a shudder of recognition. The last scene, in which Ubu drifts towards Nowhere, heralds the absurdity of the predicament of man who, in an attempt to flee Hamlet's anxieties, is forced to realize the monstrosity of life.

Jarry's extravagance was continued by G. Apollinaire de Kostrowitzky who was, first of all a poet, but also a playwright. His best play, Les mamelles de Tirésias (1917), breaks with the classical unities and linear narrative. It is a delightful illustration of Apollinaire's creative imagination. The author called his play "drame surrealist" and thus he coined the term for one of the most significant movements of the century. Apollinaire claims that, "Quand l'homme a voulu imiter la marche, il a créé la roue qui ne ressemble pas à une jambe . . . Il a fait ainsi du surréalisme sans le savoir."[47] Apollinaire insisted on widening the horizons of the artists by liberating them from restrictive dramatic formulas. What is important is his emphasis on the departure from the representational theater. In the preface to his play Apollinaire describes a dramatist as follows:

> Son universe est sa pièce
> A l'intériuer de laquelle il est le dieu créateur
> Qui dispose à son gré
> Les sons les gestes les démarches les masses les couleurs
> Non pas dans le seul but
> De photographier ce qui l'on appelle une tranche de vie
> Mais pour faire surgir la vie même dans toute sa vérité
> Car la pièce doit être un univers complet
> Avec son créateur[48].

He emphasizes the creativeness and imaginativeness of the playwright who should feel liberated from ossified theatrical conventions. Apollinaire wanted to provoke, influence and amuse; moreover, his ambition was to renovate drama. Surrealism, the neologism Apollinaire invented, "prend son point de départ dans la réalité. Or, ce qui fait la différence avec les tendences précédentes c'est que réalité se transforme au niveau de l'imagination en quelque chose d'essentiellement nouveau, en une espèce de 'sur-réalité.' "[49] Even though Apollinaire utilizes the medium of surrealism he is preoccupied with the ethical values of human life, "Guillaume Apollinaire veut simplement améliorer la condition humaine par des oeuvres d'art. Le thème de la pièce est celui de la natalité, ou plutôt de la dénatalité."[50] Les mamelles de Tirésias tells the story of Thérèse who declares that she is fed up with bearing children and wants to become a man. So she grows a beard, throws her breasts at the audience and leaves the house. Her husband, in turn, gives birth to 40.049 children. Eventually, Thérèse returns and the play ends, like a good comedy, with song and dance. The play introduces a gamut of absurdities. The most pronounced one is the factual absurdity referring to the male ability of bearing children and the metamorphosis of the main characters. A similar kind of absurdity follows in the world news reported by the journalist: a great fire has just destroyed Niagara Falls and a Princess of Bergamo is to marry a lady she met in the metro. The emerging world is permeated by nonsensical events and the reversal of the traditional male and female roles in society. Other instances of the absurd include Thérèse's blue face, blue and red breasts and the corpses coming back on stage alive. The elements of decor become animated, e.g. the Newspaper Kiosk waves its arms in protest at appropriate moments. The People of Zanzibar, represented by a mute Red Indian, communicates directly with the audience by hanging up placecards with the thoughts written on them. This is an interesting visual device on the way to silence and incommunicability to appear about forty years later in the Theater of the Absurd. Zanzibar places the action in a "nowhere land" and arises a connotation with gambling as "Apart from being a small island in the Indian Ocean, . . ., of which the spectator is not required to know anything, le zanzibar or rather le zanzi is a dice game, very popular in French bistros."[51] The People of Zanzibar also appears in the scene with two gamblers who are about to fight a duel and the People of Zanzibar draws a pistol and shoots them both. At that moment, "a mounted policeman, played by a charming blond actress, enters, centaur-like, on a hobby horse to restore order. First 'he' drags the two corpses into the wings, whence they are soon to reappear, to be gunned repeatedly."[52] In this manner, Apollinaire leads us to enchanting worlds and discoveries. This is a delightful illustration of the free play of imagination dwelling on the threshold of the kingdom of absurdity.

The third contributor to the aesthetic basis of the Theater of the Absurd is A. Artaud, who, like Apollinaire, advocated the rejection of realism in the theater. His essays on the nature of the theater entitled Le théâtre et son double (1938) constitute one of the most challenging theories ever written. Artaud argued that the contemporary theater had lost its significance due to its servitude to psychology and "human interest." The theater of "petty everydayness" has become pervaded by the cult of the word. Artaud had a deep contempt for the word and his ambition was to fill his theater with nonverbal means of expression, such as masks, music, gestures, dance, plastic art and lighting. He maintained that a language of signs and hieroglyphs carried a whole range of new associations and, consequently, was able to reach the audience more effectively. In the era of the "reverence for the text" Artaud postulated the abandonment of the priority of the written text and insisted on the visual language of the theater rather than the verbal one. The words should derive from the subconscious and be used according to their musical, not semantic values. The text could be intoned, groaned or whispered, but never recited.

Artaud maintained that the traditional stage should be replaced by such unusual places as hangars or garages where the three dimensions could be explored more easily. The most interesting experiments of this sort were conducted by E. Ionesco, about twenty years later, in Amédée and Le nouveau locataire. In contrast to Stanislavski's theory of the actor's most meticulous identification with the character, Artaud insisted on depersonalization of the characters: again, anticipating the puppet-like qualities of the absurdist characters. In terms of the répertoire Artaud was convinced that only great myths or terrible catastrophes, not "digestive" plays à la Ibsen, were still able to appeal to the spectators. Artaud compared the theater to religion and endowed it with mythical qualities believing that the theater, like magic, could through shock induce the peace of mind. Artaud was enchanted by Balinese theater, by its spontaneity and mystical tone, in which he perceived the power to evoke wonders in the same way religious ceremonies do. He argued that the contemporary theater was missing the great metaphysical fear which was at the root of all ancient theater and he endeavored to restore the theater to its original direction. To reinstate the theater in its religious and metaphysical aspect it was necessary to use more drastic means of expression:

> C'est-à-dire qu'au lieu d'en revenir à des textes considérés comme définitifs et comme sacres, il importe avant tout de rompre l'assujettissement du théâtre au texte, et de retrouver la notion d'une sort de langage unique à mi-chemin entre le geste et la pensée.[53]

The key text of Le théâtre et son double is the manifesto on the Theater of Cruelty. In the state of metaphysical marasme of society Artuad regarded cruelty as an indispensible element of each spectacle because, "Sans un élément de cruauté à la base de tout spectacle, le théâtre n'est pas possible. Dans l'etat de dégénérescence où nous sommes, c'est par la peau qu'on fera rentrer la métaphysique dans les esprits."[54] The cruelty of the performance was destined to tumble down the vision of the world inherent in spectator and to bring about a beneficient castigation of the audience. Artaud's notion of catharsis exceeds Aristotle's in that Artaud wished to take theater to an earlier phase when the spectators participated in the ceremonies at the Great Dionysia. When Aristotle formulated his theory, the glory of Athenian theater was fading and the spectators became passive observers. Whereas Aristotle regarded the theater as purgation, Artaud viewed the theater as a social necessity:

> Life has in it a lot of ugliness and evil, which are both natural and man-made. Instead of shielding spectators from their impact he would expose them, put them through the experience of danger and then free them from it. He went to great pains to explain that his theater was not a form of torture, but a facing of the worst that could happen, followed by a refreshing release from it. At the end the spectator would feel relieved, as if awakening from a nightmare, the evil and terror cleansed away (emphasis mine).[55]

Artaud's contemporaries were shocked by the audacity and unorthodoxy of his ideas, but Artaud proved that the insurrection started by Jarry was still bubbling.

Paris was not the only place where such revolutionary ideas were being planted. About ten years earlier "in Poland, which is to say Nowhere" one could read the following:

> On leaving the theater, the spectator ought to have the feeling that he has just awakened from some strange dream, in which even the most ordinary things had a strange, unfathomable charm, characteristic of dream reveries, and unlike anything else in the world (emphasis added).[56]

The above excerpt is not a repetition of Artaud's premises, but derives from a book by S. I. Witkiewicz, one of the most original yet unjustly neglected artists of the century. Like G. M. Hopkins and C. K. Norwid, Witkacy (the penname he made up for himself) was discovered several decades after his death. He embodies the tradition of individuality in Polish avant-garde and stands apart from his age. Due to the unique political situation in Poland, which reappeared as an independent country in 1918 just for a twenty-one year interlude, the country did not produce definite schools or movements in drama, but rather outstanding individuals who seemed to continue the great prophetic tradition of the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century Polish playwrights were also poets entangled in national myths who assumed the role of Messiah leading the nation to liberation through the illusions of past greatness. Early 20th century Polish drama dwelled on metaphor and visual image. Its best illustration emerges in S. Wyspiański's The Wedding (1901) which combines realism, symbolism and fantasy to show the malaise of the contemporary Polish society. In the play a chochol or mulch (a straw "man" covering a rosebush as protection from the snow and winter cold) comes to life and initiates an eerie dance with the real characters to the music it plays on a fiddle. The chochol is a visual metaphor for the hibernation of the Polish nation evoking the hope of eventual rebirth of national life from the once lifeless shell.

Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz was a man of brilliant intelligence and vast intellectual curiosity. It is difficult to find another playwright of the same period who would be able to astonish with such versatility. His interests included the pure sciences, philosophy, the social sciences, art, history, fascism, psychoanalysis, communism, capitalism, Leibnitz, Lenin, Bergson, Chwistek, Picasso, and Strindberg. He published numerous articles on philosophy and literature attacking the banality of contemporary writing as well as a treatise on drugs entitled Nicotine, Alcohol, Cocaine, Peyote, Morphine, and Ether. Witkacy's ideas were incomprehensible to his contemporaries, and he was deprived of understanding and support throughout his life. Although doomed to loneliness the tragic genius persisted in creating his bizarre visions.

It was Witkacy's ambition to create his own philosophical system enabling him to find an explanation to the question of existence. His philosophical views were constantly subjected to debate in his plays, novels and essays. The basic tenets were presented in Notions and Assertions Implied by the Notion of Being published in 1935. It is impossible to sum up his philosophy in a few sentences, but it is equally impossible to neglect his basic assertions since Witkacy himself strongly insisted on a close interrelation of philosophy and art. His point of departure is the "Queerness of Being," the feeling of amazement at contemplation of oneself and the world. According to Witkacy, the world is composed of "Particular Beings" who often wonder why they are exactly these and not those beings, on this planet, at this point of time and space and why they exist at all if they could have been without any existence. Such a feeling is called a "Metaphysical Feeling of the Strangeness of Existence." However, both philosophy and religion cease to be a sufficient source of thee meditations. Civilization in its march toward higher social developments marked by extreme mechanization of life has brought about "philosophy's suicide." Metaphysics is pronounced dead. Witkacy claimed that man escaped from the metaphysical unrest into the comfort of the herd and he doubted cultural developments in the period of social upheavals and growing industrialization. This thought was reflected in his works through the recurrent motif of a catastrophe implying political, intellectual, artistic and moral degeneration.

The world as an entity is a unity of many different elements. The "Particular Being," as an element of the structure of the world, is also a unity composed of multiple elements. A "Metaphysical Feeling" arises when a "Particular Being" experiences a total unity of its being; that is, it overcomes the duality of existence. The ability to experience the "Metaphysical Feeling" distinguishes human beings from other creatures and enables them to approach the "Mystery of Existence." Metaphysical anxiety has been reflected in man's philosophical, artistic and religious pursuits through which man has sought the explanation for the "Mystery of Existence." Due to the demise of philosophy and religion, only Art is still able to evoke the "Metaphysical Feeling" in man. According to Witkacy, art is created as a reflection of the unity of an artist's personality. Such a unity, present in every Being, is changed into multiplicity by the artist's psyche and results in the formation of Pure Form. The notion of Pure Form is fundamental and lies at the core of Witkacy's aesthetics. Witkacy regarded a work of art as a certain unity in multiplicity, that is a construction of some simple elements (colors and sounds) and more complex elements (words and actions). The result of such a unity is Pure Form which as an exteriorized Metaphysical Feeling of the author is also expected to evoke the same Feeling in the receiver. The process of reception itself exerts a cathartic effect on the receiver since it relieves the metaphysical anxiety and enables contact with the Mystery of Existence. In this effect Witkacy saw the function of art in general.

There seems to be a plausible convergence of Witkacy's and Artaud's ideas regarding the function of a theatrical play. They both believed that the theater sprang from religious rituals, but it had lost its original appeal. They both shared a strong faith in the purifying force of the theater in face of malaise of culture. Artaud advocated the theater of Magic in which a spectator was to be initiated into the myth through a cosmic trance whereas Witkacy's theater of Pure Form was destined to let a spectator experience the Mystery of Existence. They both emphasized that the theater was necessary to awaken the metaphysical awareness in a rational man.

In his essay about Pure Form in the theater Witkacy called the theater the most "complex" art because it consists of images, sounds, meanings of words and actions of the actors while music (through the use of sound alone) and painting (through the use of line and color) were considered "simple." Witkacy's aesthetic theory was formulated in The New Form of Painting where he argued that Pure Form could only be obtained through the deformation of our vision of the external world.[57] In practice, his aesthetic program was the closest to the painting of Gauguin, Matisse and early Picasso whom he greatly admired. By applying Picasso's principles of deformation of reality, Witkacy sought to liberate drama from its imposed canons and give it the formal qualities of modern art and music. Analogous to the Pure Form in painting, the Pure Form in the theater could be achieved at the price of deformation, but "the deformation of psychology and action."[58] The meaning of the play becomes clear through the perfect synthesis of all elements: sounds, scenery, movements on the stage, etc. Witkacy's views on the theater were presented in his book, The Theater (1923) where he gave an example of an ideal play in Pure Form:

> Three characters dressed in red come on stage and bow to no one in particular. One of them recites a poem (it should create a feeling of urgent necessity at this very moment). A kindly old man enters leading a cat on a string. So far everything has taken place against a background of

> screen. The screen comes apart, and an Italian landscape becomes visible. Organ music is heard. The old man talks with the other characters, and what they say should be in keeping with what has gone on before. A glass falls off the table. All of them fall on their knees and weep. The old man changes from a kindly man into a ferocious "butcher" and murders a little girl who has just crawled in from the left. At this very moment a handsome young man runs in and thanks the old man for murdering the girl, at which point the characters in red sing and dance. Then the young man weeps over the body of the little girl and says very amusing things, whereupon the old man becomes once again kindly and good-natured and laughs to himself in a corner, uttering sublime and limpid phrases . . . . whether it be drama, tragedy, farce, or the grotesque, all in a uniform style and unlike anything which previously existed.[59]

Witkacy's "style not resembling anything that exists" continues the aesthetic line established by Jarry and Apollinaire. These authors attempted to abandon life as it appears in favor of a rather loose series of episodes without external verisimilitude or psychological motivation. The theater of Witkacy, however, illustrates the most abrupt divergence from the cliches of the naturalistic theater. Witkacy considered realism in the theater a reflection of a deep crisis of thought and argued that realistic plays express nothing but decadence.

Witkacy used to emphasize that the theater had lost its mythical and mystic qualities due to its separation from religious rituals. He wondered whether, in face of growing mechanization and deteriorating metaphysics, it was possible to restore the lost solemnity of the theater. Witkacy believed that metaphysics was buried beneath the callousness of modern life and could reach the mind only through the aesthetics of aggressiveness. In his plays Witkacy used to apply a peculiar mixture of unpleasant elements, called "the perversity of artistic devices," by which he meant, for example, strange combinations of words and actions, musical dissonances, ugly color coordination, unnatural size of objects, etc. Deliberate distortions of this sort reflect Witkacy's peculiar propensity for the grotesque.

Undoubtedly, Artaud's term "cruelty," coined over ten years later, echoes Witkacy's "perversity of artistic devices." It is possible to trace a few more similarities in the theoretical writings of Artaud and Witkacy. Their common point of departure was the condemnation of the naturalistic theater. They both believed that the theater was not fulfilling its proper function and they looked for the sources of renewal in exotic cultures. Artaud found inspiration in the Balinese theater while Witkacy was fascinated with Indian philosophers and the culture of Australia and Ceylon. What is crucial is that they both searched for a genuinely other non-contemporary culture. Later Artaud also sought to expose the moral cheapness of art and to condemn the theater as a mere source of entertainment. They both conceive of themselves as physicians of culture and regarded the new theater, when administered with a dose of cruelty or perversity, as the only remedy being able to reestablish the sense of life in man.

In their theoretical writing, Witkacy and Artaud raised the issue of a new language which should ban the supremacy of the word. They emphasized the importance of visual elements in the theater. In fact, Witkacy's plays can be best described as three-dimensional pictures with sounds. Witkacy maintained that the arrangement of the actors on the stage was very significant and insisted that the actors should be aware of their being only elements of a formal construction designed to shock the spectators. He rejected Stanislavski's idea of the actors experiencing the "inner" life of the role. The actor should attempt to grasp "the formal conception of the work (as distinct from its real-life mood)) and its character apart from all real-life possibilities." [60] Therefore, the actor should devote himself to the contribution of the total theatrical experience instead of a mere imitation of tones and gestures.

Whereas Artaud oscillates towards the abandonment of the word, Witkacy delights in linguistic experimentation. The language of his plays bears little resemblance to everyday speech and is characterized by extreme inventiveness. Witkacy coins new words, juxtaposes meanings and endows his characters with an unexpected idiom of speech. His originality is evident in the names Witkacy creates for his dramatis personae: for example, in The Shoemakers, there is a prosecutor Robert Scurvy whose name sounds like the Polish expression meaning "the son of a bitch" and the name turns out to be appropriate for the character. Many of those extraordinary names, unfortunately, lose their viciousness in translation.

Witkacy's plays depict protagonists who become absurd in their search for uniqueness in the world determined to equalize everyone. The world they live in appears as an unreal land devoid of logic and ethics. The characters torture one another, indulge in orgies and narcotics and lack credibility. The most frequent of all characters is a

> Titan, a mathematical genius or most insatiable artist. Titan undergoes all the tortures of the limitations of being a "Particular Being." He is consumed by the urge of greatness and of constant acting, he cannot find a release for his bursting energy; he cannot sleep, foam bubbles from his mouth. Titans are always bored . . . They murder, torture, and rape without scruples, yet for no selfish reason, only to produce metaphysical shock."[61]

They endeavor to find their identity at all costs. Demonic women are Titans' partners. They are bored with men, but also dependent upon men and "Sexually insatiable, they promise to the Titans the most perverse pleasures. They demand greatness from their males, yet they also want to destroy them . . ."[62] Witkacy's plays astonish in order to administer a sense of Metaphysical Wonder to their audience. They usually present the experiences of degenerate people in face of growing mechanization of life and focus around Witkacy's dominant themes: catastrophism, revolution, ennui, death, suicide, perverseness and eroticism. The plays reveal their author's unusually brilliant mind in frequent scientific, philosophical and artistic discussions. Witkacy's omnipresent subversive attitude was particularly annoying to the critics and earned him an extremely hostile reception.

Witkacy often combines the tragic and the comic which expresses a specific kind of grotesquerie and exaggeration; for example, in Act I of The Mother, Leon's mother makes a long speech about Leon using such words as "phoniness" and suddenly switches into a praising tone "Almighty God! How beautifully You have arranged the lives of even the most lowly, how Your concern for Your own glory is apparent in everything!" while her servant, Dorothy, comments in the following way, "Whew, you really got smashed today, ma'am."[63] The final scene of The Mother is marked by the simultaneous presence of three tenses: past, present and future. It depicts physical doubling and displacement in time which represents a total denial of the traditional theater. The audience witnesses the substantiation of Witkacy's darkest fears about the future of an artist in industrialized society.

While The Mother (1924) does not leave a ray of hope for the individual, The Madman and the Nun (1923) presents a grotesquely triumphant victory of the individual over a hostile society. The play contains the major themes and techniques found in Witkacy's other plays and, due to its short and condensed form, has most often been staged. The play is dedicated to all madmen in the world and subtitled

"There Is Nothing Bad Which Could Not Turn Into Something Worse." The subtitle is a distortion of an old Polish saying, "There is nothing bad which could not turn into something better," and it reveals the typical Witkacian mocking attitude to the surrounding world. Such a ridiculing attitude to stabilized reality and petrified artistic forms has become a major characteristic of modern literature. Witkacy seems to share this feature with the later writers of Absurd literature. The picture of the world as madhouse is a frequent motif in modern dramatic literature. In The Madman and the Nun the world is reduced to one cell in the mental asylum which is inhabited by Witkacy's most frustrating fears. His indignation at being treated as a madman by his contemporaries grows drastically and explodes in dénouement. The milieu of the mental asylum gives a dream-like atmosphere and creates an oppressive feeling of claustrophobia. The juxtaposition of the mad poet's creative mind and his imposed environment produces dramatic tension and deepens the contrast between his individuality and the herd represented symbolically by the asylum's staff. Walpurg is still a strong individual who hates conformity. His yearning for uniqueness is rendered as madness in the play which explores the possibilities of "curing" the mad artist.

The defeat of individuality was a lifelong obsession of Witkacy. He believed that the quintessence of creative powers resided in the individuality of the artist. Society, in its longing for conformity, constrained all original talent and imposed limits on the individual. Walpurg represents such a suppressed artist, but he rebels against the systems imprisoning the individual. His liberation from the confinement leads through the transgression of established norms and taboos. The dénouement of the play presents the utter defiance of logic and dramatic principles. No moral order is preserved and the demarcation line between life and death, sanity and madness is blurred. The audience observes Walpurg dead and alive at the same time. All absolutes collapse. The theatricalization of corpses is Witkacy's interesting contribution to the modern theater. Witkacy was conscious of this technique and used it for the purpose of evoking the Feeling of Metaphysical Wonder. Through the careful handling of time and space Witkacy makes Walpurg's life before suicide seem death; then, the principle of opposition turns Walpurg's death into future life. The Madman and the Nun contains three endings: first, the traditional tragic one, making Walpurg a victim of society; second, the comically transcendental one, showing his glorious resurrection; and, third, the grotesque one, turning the victimizers into their own executioners.

Witkacy is now regarded as one of the most original talents of the 20th century. His rare artistic genius produced an astonishing mixture of qualities which excludes the possibility of ranking him in any movement or school. In this respect, his artistic path is reminiscent of Jarry's, Apollinaire's and Artaud's. However, his theatrical practice represents the most accomplished synthesis of avant-garde tendencies. He created an original theory of the theater based on the total denial of the mimetic principle where fantastic psychology and action win complete freedom for formal elements. Witkacy regarded Art, the theater in particular, as the only possible means to evoke Metaphysical Feelings which were being suppressed by society. Therefore, he was extremely hostile toward "the pulpy cattle" and constantly ridiculed its narrow-mindedness and conformity. His pursuit of the Pure Form usually shocked the average theater goers in the 1920s and 1930s, only the 1950s brought recognition of his rare talent. Dehumanization of society equals deformation in Art and becomes the basic category in Witkacy's aesthetics. It was exactly through the deformation of psychology and action that Witkacy aimed at the supremacy of formal elements. His artistic ingenuity is revealed in experimental technique which makes use of parody, caricature and black humour in order to protest the restraints imposed by society.

Witkacy, a consummate iconoclast, continues the aesthetic line established by Jarry's Ubu roi in Guybal Wahazar (1921). Both plays deal with a terrifying character of an omnipotent dictator who rules his subjects with unrestricted power. Jarry deliberately simplifies Ubu's personality and explores its instinctive side. The personality of Ubu is reduced to the Id which dwells on physiology alone. Wahazar, on the other hand, represents the case of a strong Ego with an implanted idea of self-righteousness and his personality, even though purposefully distorted, oscillates towards lofty idealism. Wahazar forecasts the character of totalitarian dictators like Hitler and Stalin with frightening accuracy and the play itself appears an astonishing political prophecy. Guybal Wahazar depicts a future mechanized society in which men act like automatons, but still have human demands. The clients, waiting with petitions for months, are not able to puncture the wall of Wahazar's indifference. Wahazar is enveloped in his own world in which he endlessly pursues metaphysical ends. His behavior is based on sudden shifts between inertia and explosions of fury and the insatiable urge for Metaphysics is rendered through physical violence. Wahazar claims he has no equals, "I'm not like emperors and kings--I'm in another spiritual dimension. I'm such a great genius at living that Napoleon, Caesar, Alexander and other caper-cutters like them are nothing compared to me . . ."[64] Wahazar addresses his clients in an unusual way, "Understand, you shrivelled-up, sluttish old bags? I've got a brain like a barrel. I could be anything I wanted to be, whatever I took fancy to. Understand? Huh??" (p. 110). Wahazar's pride reaches an apogee when he asserts, "I am alone, like God. I alone rule everything, and I'm responsible for everything, and answer only to myself alone" (p. 110). Furthermore, Wahazar considers himself the only true artist. When Flaytrix, "literary man, thin, male, 38 years old, long, fair hair, completely clean shaven," insults him, Wahazar orders to, "shoot that clown immediately," and concludes, "--now there's one less literary man. Right away the air's clearing. I don't like writing myself, and I can't stand scribblers. A dog breed, damn it!" (pp. 101, 112, 113, respectively). Wahazar, like other Witkacian protagonists, is obsessed with the lot of an individual. "His Onlyness" himself is imprisoned in the micro-universe of his personality and any attempts at transgression of his identity end in a grotesque fiasco accompanied, quite often, by his frothing at the mouth.

Wahazar embodies a martyrdom of an individual in a mass society and the spectators witness his slow annihilation. Wahazar is determined to cling to power even though it leads through the waves of extreme anxiety and deep apathy. His character lacks stable features and his insatiable craving for greatness achieves caricatural proportions. The strangeness of his character is rendered not only through his unusual behavior, but also through his appearance, "Long, black walrus mustache, disheveled black hair, black eyes . . . Very wide light green pants and long violet shoes visible beneath them. Crimson jacket. Black soft hat. A titan. Hoarse voice" (p. 101). More importantly, Wahazar contributes to the strangeness of atmosphere through the idiom of speech. He curses, insults, shouts and whispers, but never stops being cruel through words. This is one of the forms of aggressiveness Witkacy uses to shock his audience. The content of the statement reflects Witkacy's philosophical tenets; among them, his constant concern with the degeneration of an individual under the influence of the masses; for example, in Act I Wahazar claims that:

> We've got to go beyond the individual--otherwise we won't create anything. I want to restore to all of humanity what it has lost; and despite the price it has paid to get where it is, mankind is trying to become, if it hasn't already become, something exactly like a beehive, an anthill, a swarm of locust, a nest of wasps, or something similar (p. 113).

Doctor Rypman sums up Wahazar's intentions, "His Onlyness is the Ramses II of the contemporary age. He wants to demechanize humanity . . ." (p. 125). Wahazar's endeavors are absurd due to an undeniable dissonance between his attempts and the actual silence of the surrounding world.

The world in which Wahazar lives reminds one of estranged surrealist pictures, it is never stagnant and its reality has the qualities typical of dreams. Witkacy deliberately rejects the rules of causal drama and alludes to the new discoveries in physics and mathematics. Guybal Wahazar carries references to Einstein's theory of relativity and Gauss's geometry and is referred to as a "six-dimensional continuum in time." In Act I one old woman makes the following comment, "She does not think any of us knows Einstein's theories. They're teaching absolute differential calculus in high schools now," to which the other woman replies enthusiastically, "Long live Gauss! Long live general coordinates! Now we all know what tensors are!" (p. 104). Later, Wahazar himself roars, "The sixth dimension! The non-Euclidean state!! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! (he chokes in an attack of infernal laughter, frothing at the mouth)" (p. 128).

The reality of Guybal Wahazar is kaleidoscopic and deliberately distorted in order to appear grotesque and Absurd. The atmosphere of the play is pervaded by terror, but also pertains to dream-like reality. It seems to invite the spectators for a walk "along the cliffs of the absurd," as the subtitle states, which terminates in metaphysical limbo. Wahazar's frustrated life ends in an absurd death:

> Morbidetto rushes over the door and throws the lasso around Wahazar's neck . . . Wahazar falls over backward, his arms stretched out in front of him. Morbidetto pulls the noose tight, standing with one foot on Wahazar's chest. Wahazar's legs twitch a few times and he dies. Silence. (p. 166).

Wahazar's death signifies the collapse of individualism; in other words, it is a prelude to the new era of collective power. Father Unguenty sheds light on one aspect of the new reality when he addresses Morbidetto in the following way, "Morbidetto, now you are mine. You will be my driving force, my relaxation, or, my court Absurdity of life. The only possible way to relax is in total absurdity" (p. 171, emphasis added). The sense of absurdity is enhanced by the departure from mimetic principles, abandonment of causality in action and psychological justification of characters' behavior. In Guybal Wahazar the last scene is an example of such a nonsensical approach. Clodgrain talks with Scabrosa and suddenly, "he puts his arm around her and kisses her on the mouth. Upstage the three hangmen, the two Pneumatics and the four Perpendicularists burst out in savage laughter" (p. 171). Despite the fact that Witkacy's plays do not present the devaluation of language which is an essential characteristic of the Theater of the Absurd, they share themes and dramatic devices used by dramatists of the Absurd in the 1950s and 1960s:

> L'expression des obsessions intimes de l'auteur, de l'interrogation métaphysique qui l'angoisse, l'isolement de l'individu dans l'univers, l'ennui, l'impossibilité d'un rapport profond et réel avec les autres, d'une part; l'abandon de l'intrigue suivi, du personnage individualisé avec ses motivation logiques, le rejet apparent de la pyschologie qui se révèle être au contraire un véritable approfondissement dans le sens de la psychanalyse, la rupture des catégories du tragique et du comique, la parodie et le recours constant à la destruction de l'illusion théâtrale, d'autre part; voilà autant de points communs.[65]

The plays of S. I Witkiewicz form a bridge between the early pioneer plays of Jarry and Apollinaire and the post-Second World War plays of the Theater of the Absurd. Witkacy's virtuosity has not been surpassed. The Polish playwright set the tone for another period of artistic explosion based on the denial of classical forms of dramatic construction. The Theater of the Absurd meets these requirements and demands new tools for critical analysis which would liberate the readers from the maze of sterile theatrical conventions.

Notes

[1] P. Edwards, ed., The Encyclopedia of Philosophy (New York: MacMillan, 1967), p. 468.

[2] Ibid., p. 490.

[3] Ibid., p. 512.

[4] Ibid., p. 515.

[5] Ibid., p. 515.

[6] P. Edwards, p. 147.

[7] Ibid., p. 54.

[8] Ibid., p. 337.

[9] Ibid., p. 461.

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II. New Theater, New Approach

1. The Specificity of Theater Semiotics

If it is true, as M. Esslin suggests, that the Theater of the Absurd has opened up a new dimension of the stage through its subversion of the conventions of classical drama and, more recently, its radical divergence from the "standard" mimetic procedures of nineteenth-century bourgeois drama, it seems likely that "traditional" modes of dramatic analysis concentrating on plot and character development or on linguistic features such as dialog and imagery will no longer apply or will at least require substantial modification. It is my view that the relatively recent semiotic approach to drama, which bases itself on a rigorous analysis of the various signs and codes involved in the process of communication in the theater, is best suited to an understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of the Theater of the Absurd. The discriminatory classifications of theater semiotics facilitate the analysis of visual, as well as verbal, components within the dramatic performance, allowing us to see the moral, social and psychological concerns of the theater in terms of an interplay of formal elements. This emphasis on form is particularly appropriate to the Theater of the Absurd, which conveys its major themes (the alienation of the individual, the breakdown of communication, etc.) precisely through its disruption of conventional forms of verbal exchange and visual presentation.

Throughout the centuries, theater criticism concentrated on the analysis of language as a main core of dramatic dialog. The tradition of investigating drama through dialog dates back to Aristotle who regarded drama as a literary work and devoted very little discussion to the spectacle. He believed it to be least artistic of all parts and unnecessary for the tragic effect. Many centuries later, Lessing insisted that drama could only be described as a whole when both the drama and the performance are considered. Contemporary tendencies seem to point to the text as a verbal component of the performance. Other components of the performance, such as facial expressions, movements or voice modifications, have been the object of much polemic but little research. S. I Witkiewicz was one of the first dramatists and theorists of the theater to realize the importance of the visual elements of the performance. A painter himself, he was arranging the characters on stage to create visual patterns and thus to represent relationships among them. Witkiewicz's pictorial conception of space was manifested in the manner of scene presentation. The stage text of his dramas did not unfold as a continuous flux, "but as a whole clearly broken up into single 'stills' organized synchronically, each of which set within the decor like a picture in a frame."[1] A. Artaud advocated the liberation of the theater from the tyranny of words and their substitution by a "language of signs, gestures and attitudes having an ideographic value as they exist in certain unperverted pantomimes."[2]

Logos-dominated Western theater did not develop firm and durable conventions regarding the visual aspects of the performance. In Eastern culture, there exists a solid kinesic lexicon; for example, "The Indian Kathakali dance theater has the repertory of 800 mudras or syntactic units (64 limb movements, 9 head movements, 11 kinds of glance, etc.) and a range of fixed meanings correlated to them (in terms of character, emotions, etc.).[3] The lack of equivalent kinesic conventions in Western theater accounts for the relative neglect of this field of study. Therefore, the non-verbal aspect of the theater will be of a particular interest in our context. Yet early attempts to analyze the theater concentrated on the search for a theatrical language. However, any reconstruction of a language of the theater posits numerous theoretical problems. First of all, it is fundamental to prove that all theatrical languages are systems of certain signs which need appropriate codes in order to be understood by the audience. It seems highly unlikely that semioticians will arrive at such a systematic description of all systems of signification used in the theater since they would have to establish the particular elements of each system and rules of their operation. The theater is an open structure in the sense that it makes use of elements from external reality which cannot be proved to have a systematic nature. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to isolate the smallest meaningful unit of a theatrical language. It seems questionable whether a definition of "theatreme" (by analogy with morpheme) be ever given. While the adoption of the linguistic model of analysis leads to interesting results in the realm of the novel, it seems extremely one-sided in the theater which is based on numerous media for the articulation of its message, e.g. music, costume, gesture, lighting, etc.

The Theater of the Absurd, through the denial of classical conceptions of drama production, demands a radical liberation from the conventional mode of critical analysis. The so-called "thematic" approach seems barren on the grounds of the Theater of the Absurd. M. Esslin rightly points out that

> The Theater of the Absurd has regained the freedom of using language as merely one--sometimes dominant, sometimes submerged--component of its multidimensional poetic imagery. By putting the language of the scene in contrast to the action, by reducing it to meaningless pattern, or by abandoning discursive logic for the poetic logic of association and assonance, the Theater of the Absurd has opened up a new dimension of the stage.[4]

Although the polysemic nature of the signs does not facilitate any categorization, the theatrical signs share one characteristic: their conventionality. Although the conventional nature of linguistic signs has been emphasized "ad nauseam," the conventionality of the performance is indisputable if the performance is accepted as a linguistic construct. Each theatrical performance is based on a certain "agreement" between actors and the audience. In traditional theater the stage is clearly marked and the audience distanced from the actors. The audience is aware of the actors' assumed identities and other conventions. But beyond mere denotations theatrical signs inevitably acquire secondary meanings which refer to cultural signification. The sign of one sign-relationship becomes, through connotations, the basis for a second sign-relationship, e.g. an actor eating plain bread and drinking water evokes the idea of poverty. Therefore, the theatrical performance by using a limited number of sign-vehicles can, in fact, generate an unlimited number of cultural phenomena due to the connotative power of the sign: costume, for example, draws attention to social, economic, psychological and sometimes even moral features of the characters. The connotative markers may depend on semantic conventions governing the performance. In Japanese Noh theater, for example, even a slight change of the position of the finger has significance. In modern theater linguistic signs are frequently abandoned, e.g. in the experimental "Laboratory Theater" of Jerzy Grotowski or Beckett's "Actes sans parole." However, it is not only the iconic aspect of the theatrical performance that determines its meaning. It emerges as a result of a dialectical antinomy between iconicity and conventionality.

Whereas there have been many interesting attempts made to describe literature (the narrative, for example, in the works of Y. Lotman) in semiotic terms, the heterogeneous nature of theatrical sign and the interaction of related disciplines as proxemics, kinesics, iconology, musicology have deterred the development of theater semiotics. Theater semiotics cannot simply follow the model of general semiotics because it has to wrestle with the basic paradox of theater practice and theater theory. Three eminent semioticians, U. Eco, R. Barthes, and A. Helbo, point to different aspects of the specificity of theater semiotics. U. Eco defines it in the following passage:

> Semiotics can be conceived of either as a unified theoretical approach to the great variety of systems of signification and communication, and in this sense it constitutes a metalinguistic discourse dealing with any of its objects by means of homogeneous categories, or it can be conceived as a description of these various systems insisting on their mutual differences, their specific cultural properties, their idiosyncrasies--from verbal language to gestures, from visual images to body positions, from musical sounds to fashions.[5]

Eco discusses the parameters of the theatrical situation by giving an example of a drunkard who is interpreted to evoke the idea of temperance. The human body of the drunkard is ostended on stage and is thus transformed into a sign. Ostention generates the performance which, in turn, leads to the process of semiotization. The process of interpretation, based on varied cultural conventions, results in a set of possible meanings.

R. Barthes points out another peculiarity of the performance text:

> What we have, then, is a real informational polyphony, which is what theatricality is: a density of signs (in relation to literary monody and leaving aside the question of the cinema) . . . Every performance is an extremely dense semantic act: the nature of the theatrical sign, whether analogical, symbolic, or conventional, the denotation and connotation of the message--all these fundamental problems of semiology are present in the theater.[6]

The density of theatrical signs and their polysemic nature calls for a theoretical approach which would deal with the theater as a specific combination of homogeneous signifying systems. Early studies were based on linguistic and narrative models (Souriau, Ingarden). They were followed by the theories of Hansen, Segre and Greimas, which were inspired by developments in the field of narrative poetics (especially the works of Chatman, Van Dijk, Todorov and others).[7] The description of the theater in terms of speech act theory does not reflect its overall significance, either. The Rumanian school, particularly the works of Marcus and Dinu, sheds new light on theater studies by introducing logical-mathematical and cybernetic models.[8]

The difficulty in arriving at a unified semiotic model of the theater derives from the fact that the theater is a complex discourse consisting of readable and visual elements. Helbo captures that paradox in the following passage:

> . . . the specificity of theater consists in always offering a narrative structure, which always reduces the coexistence of readable and visible to that of verbal and visual. The production brings into play a named/displayed world through vehicles of manifestation more numerous than those of the two-dimensional image . . ., in a tri-dimensional physical space and in a cognitive space which is both aleatory and experienced collectively.[9]

The inherent dichotomy between the actual written text and its performance seems to be the semiotic "bone of contention." The performance itself is regarded by many critics as a mere illustration of the written text. The semioticians seem to focus on the relationship of the written text to its possible staging. A. Serpieri, for example, regards the written text as a set of theatrical signs while P. Pugliatti sees the written text as a network of latent theatrical signs which are realized in a performance.[10] Some semioticians follow Chomskian terminology and view the written text as a deep structure with the surface structure embodied in the performance. The written text, naturally, precedes the performance; it dictates what actors have to say, how they should move, in what setting, etc. Consequently, it seems justifiable to accept the superiority of the written text over the performance text. The relationship between them is of a dynamic nature:

> The written text/performance text relationship is . . . a complex of reciprocal constraints constituting a powerful intertextuality. Each text bears the other's traces, the performance assimilates those aspects of the written play which the performance chooses to transcodify, and the

> dramatic text being "spoken" at every point by the model performance--or the *n* possible performances --that motivate it.[11]

Thus the dual nature of the text in the theater is evident in the dichotomy between the written text on the one hand, which combines the dramatic text (written signs meant for reading) and production text (stage directions) and, on the other, the performance text (the realization of the two previous texts on stage). For the purpose of this chapter, it will be accepted that the global message of the theater consists of the sum of the written text (verbal signs) and the performance text (verbal and non-verbal signs). Consequently, the object of my semiotic study will be *the theatrical text* which represents the catalogue of signs meant for reading *and* the performance.

Finally, the specificity of theater semiosis is manifested in the relationship between numerous signifiers which may belong to different sign systems and one specific signified. This is illustrated in the following example:

> Un certain bruitage est le signe de la pluie. Le son émis par la tôle du bruiteur est dans ce cas LE SIGNIFIANT, l'idee qu'il pleut est *LE SIGNIFIÉ*. Mais la pluie peut être représentée (signifié) au théâtre de plusieurs façon, au moyen de différents systèmes de signes: par l'élairage (projection), le costume (impermeable et capuchon), l'accessoire (parapluie), le geste (acteur qui se secoue en entrant), la coiffure (cheveux mouillés), la musique, et surtout la parole. Il y a donc differents signes (simultanés ou succesifs), différents signifiants, mais le signifié est toujours le même: 'il pleut.'[12]

The theatrical signs, due to their iconicity, will always differ from the corresponding verbal signs. It means that while the verbal signs can still be vague in some respects, the non-verbal signs are more concrete because they represent the qualities of things directly. They carry additional meaning which accompanies the meaning created by verbal signs. The name of the character alone (e.g. Hamlet) may evoke many associations from other areas (e.g. myth or religion), but it does not denote as much as a concrete body of the actor with all his physical characteristics. Similarly, a mere description of stage and costumes is incomplete in comparison to the signs realized in a concrete performance. The signs entering into various constellations will eventually generate additional meaning thus affecting a final global message. Therefore, it is difficult to speak of equivalence of meaning between the dramatic text and the performance text.

Yet, the theater is an amalgam of various utterances which may and, in fact, do refer to one another. M. Issacharoff argues that

> what _is_ peculiar to the (modern) drama script and distinguishes it _referentially_ from other types of literary discourse is its two-layered structure consisting of dialogue plus didascalia.[13]

In dramatic dialog, references can be directed at real people or places; people and places existing in a possible world of the play, and imaginary people and places. The referential status of real people and places in dramatic discourse is practically the same as in the non-dramatic text. Issacharoff also distinguishes two other types of reference: referential mixing--"consisting of definite singular extratextual reference and story or play relative reference" and referential subversion which occurs in drama, "the one literary medium in which the verbal may be enhanced, transformed, or even subverted through visual means, including costume, decor, and lighting."[14] At the level of didascalia, the author (a real person) refers to the reader, director and the actors in order to give them information about what is to be said in the future. In experimental drama, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, the didascalia are quite often in referential conflict with the dramatic dialog (as in Beckett's *En Attendant Godot*).

The referent in drama allows "a logical and semantical formulation of verbal communication, plot structure, and function of the characters."[15] The experimental theater is based on referential manipulations which result in incongruity; for example, in *Ubu roi*, Jarry plays with the references which are emptied of their referential power by improper use of Polish names and historical events. Such an incongruous use of referents contributes to the atmosphere of absurdity pervading the play. Similarly, in *Les mamelles de Tirésias*, Apollinaire experiments with the referential force of signs and breaks the links between sign and referent. V. Krysinksi argues that the breasts of Thérèse (after her metamorphosis into a man) become "autonomous stage sign-objects created through incongruity . . . a sign which no longer corresponds to any real referent."[16] Witkiewicz was also interested in the autonomy of the theater which could only be achieved through the deformation of reality and the self-referring nature of the performance. The early theories of the pre-war iconoclasts mark the beginning of the experimental trend in the theater. From Jarry, through Apollinaire and Witkiewicz to Artaud, "the autonomy of the theatrical text is contingent on an intensified use of incongruity and the emptying of referents and reference of their real content."[17] The proper use of reference in drama facilitates the process of communication, forwards the plot and guarantees the proper participation of characters in it. It is my thesis that through the subversion of the proper process of referring in drama, the dramatists create the phenomenon of absurdity which destroys communicative interaction, annihilates the plot and dehumanizes the characters.

The theater is merely one manifestation of cultural phenomena. The thesis that culture is communication was presented by E. Hall in The Silent Language (1959) and later elaborated by the Tartu school of semiotics.[18] Culture is regarded as a set of heterogeneous phenomena (including theater) which share one aspect: they are all realizations of various semiotic systems consisting of signs. Signs play a paramount role in culture. They pervade social, political, ritual and aesthetic aspects of human life, enable social communication which guarantees the functioning of social life and permit the storage of information. Since signs are so important in culture, it seems that the most fruitful approach would be one based on the exegesis of the primary modelling system, that is, a natural language. Therefore, the first semiotic models to investigate secondary modelling systems (such as the theater) come from the domain of linguistics.

Clearly, one cannot draw too many parallels between linguistic systems and the systems employed by the theater. The most important observation is that language is one of the systems participating in theater semiosis. Consequently, linguistic tools of analysis can be adequate for the study of this system in isolation. I would like to emphasize, however, that language is just one of the systems active during performance. The actors on stage behave in one way or another and their behavior, whether in terms of body movements (kinesics) or space handling (proxemics) bears significance for the audience. The theater, as a secondary modelling system of culture, will be regarded as a communication phenomenon in my study.

The next step is to find the most appropriate model of communication allowing the analysis of theater and performance possibilities. The most popular model of communication process comes from The Mathematical Theory of Communication by C. Shannon. It identifies basic elements of a communication act: sender and receiver, message sent through a channel and the noise. To understand the theater as a communication practice raises several fundamental issues. First of all, it presupposes the existence of sender, message and receiver. While in an average situation of human interaction all three categories can remain explicit, in the case of the theater, they generate ambiguity. The sender can be the author, director or actor, and the receiver is usually multiple: the audience. The exact nature of the message is also obscure because it is communicated by various sign systems in a multimedial manner. Nevertheless, any communication process relies on signs which function by means of various codes. Having established the object of my study (the theatrical text) and its main function (communication), I shall now proceed to analyze theatrical signs, codes and the process of communication in the theater.

2. Classification of Theatrical Signs

The earliest attempts to present the theater in semiotic terms can be traced to central Europe where in the 1930s and 1940s the Czech scholars analyzed the phenomenon of the theater from a semiotic perspective. The basic point of departure was Mukařovský's thesis that art was a semiotic act. The period of theatrical studies was initiated by O. Zich's

Aesthetics of Dramatic Art (1931) and there followed a body of books and articles by P. Bogatyrev, J. Honzl and R. Jakobson. The scholars who developed the Prague School theory of the theater drew attention to the heterogeneity and interdependence of the various systems present in the theater which do not only carry meaning by themselves, but acquire different semiotic potentialities through clashes among them. The theater was perceived as a separate semiotic system consisting of various heterogeneous signs deriving from other aesthetic realms such as music, architecture, and sculpture. Therefore, the theater emerged as the most complex art form consisting of various components. J. Veltruský gives an example of the complexity of theatrical signs and their clashes in the following passage:

> On the stage the statue loses its characteristic plurality of "views" because the spectator sees it from one angle only. It may, however, be endowed with new qualities under the impact of theatrical lighting (Bogatyrev, 1938b). Moreover, the ability to convey meanings pertaining to time, process, movement, forces, tensions and such like, which sculpture possesses despite its immobility and the law of gravity to which it is subject, may be brought out when it is juxtaposed and by the same token contrasted with the actor on the stage. A contrast between the immobility of the statue and the mobility of the actor may arise even if there is no sculpture on the stage, for example when the actors' performance is designed to separate their postures from their movements, when the immobile mask is substituted for the play of the facial muscles, and so on.[19]

As a result, a play was analyzed as a complex consisting of the braid of heterogeneous entities. The constant factors enumerated by the Prague School theoreticians were actor, action, and space. O. Zich in his fundamental treatise pointed out that dramatic performance is a set of signs, and he divided them into visual and auditory signs. The prevalent trend in the Czech work was to discuss the theater in terms of the relationship of the elements to the whole. Thus J. Honzl suggested the following approach:

> It is my belief that with our analysis of the changeability of the theatrical sign we have undertaken a task that can test the trustworthiness of many definitions of theatrical art and decide whether those definitions make provision for the old and new types of theater that have originated in different poetic or dramatic personalities, as the result of many technical inventions, and so on.[20]

Mukarovský, on the other hand, adopted the Saussurian definitions of the sign. This approach does not bear fruit in the field of the theater since the performance becomes a macro-sign which cannot be analyzed in its totality. It became obvious that the text was to be broken down into its basic components; therefore, the scholars concentrated on the description of theatrical signs and sign-functions. It was P. Bogatyrev who pinpointed one of the most important features of the semiotics of the theater. In "Les signes du théâtre" Bogatyrev drew attention to the fact that apart from the signs of objects, real objects are utilized as well (e.g. a diamond ring does not only relate to the class of diamonds, but also points out the wealth of the person who wears it). Bogatyrev stresses the flexibility of the theatrical sign, the fact that the sign can shift both in its own right and in the measures the audience perceives it. He points out the polysemic nature of meaning of costume which, for example, can signify the character's nationality and social status. The practical function of the sign is suppressed on the stage in favor of its signifying role, "The first principle of the Prague School theoretical theory can be best termed that of the semiotization of the object."[21] The objects used in the theater are not only destined to support characterization, but are also meant to participate in dramatic action. Bogatyrev emphasized the diversity of theatrical signs and their wide referential force, but he failed to establish a classification of theatrical signs. In spite of some flaws the Prague School laid solid foundations for further developments in the semiotics of the theater.

The first lengthy studies devoted to theater semiosis were published in the 1970s. In 1976 P. Pavis's Problèmes de sémiologie théâtrale was published and followed by A. Ubersfeld's Lire le théâtre (1977). It was not until 1980 that the first full length study of theater semiotics appeared in English. K. Elam's The Semiotics of Theater and Drama provides a thorough survey of all that has been done in that field perviously as well as a personal model of theater semiotics. In determining the nature of the theatrical sign both Pavis and Ubersfeld refer to the basic mode of icon/index/symbol established by Peirce.

Pavis stresses the fundamental iconic function of the theatrical sign since the audience perceives the actors and decor. It is possible to recognize "l'icône littérale" and l'icone mimétique" and the latter one prevails in the theater. Pavis defines the icon in the following way:

> L'icône théâtrale se définira donc non pas tant comme un signe dont signifiant et signifié, mais comme un signe dont le référent est actualisé sur scène. Le rapport entre signe et referent est motivé.[22]

The dominating function of the icon is the semantic function and the most often used semiotic system is the visual one. The relationship between the "signifiant" and the "signifié" is based on analogy and motivation. Index, the sign which does not have intrinsic signification, but relates one sign to the other, is anchored in the message. Its dominating function is pragmatic and the most often used semiotic systems are visual and linguistic. The relationship between "signifiant" and "signifié" is described as "contiguité" and "existentielle." The indexical function is concerned with the actor's message to the spectator (e.g. the wet coat conveys the idea of the rain for the spectators). Pavis is correct when he claims that icon and index are fundamental to the theater:

> Comme énoncé, l'écriture théâtrale se présente sous les aspects de l'indice et de l'icône. Indice en tant qu'elle signale toujours les pôles de l'acte de communication (je-tu). Icône en tant qu'elle nous dispose à imagine une action dramatique, oû se mimerait l'acte de communication.[23]

In the last type of the sign, symbol, the semantic and syntactic functions dominate. Symbol, in contrast to icon, always employs linguistic system. The relationship between the "signifiant" and "signifié" is "non-analogique" and "non-motivé."

The first attempt at the typology of theatrical signs was taken up by the Polish semiotician, Tadeusz Kowzan in his essay, "The Sign in the Theater" (1968).[24] He refers to the basic principle of the Prague School--everything is a sign in a theatrical performance and he asserts the connotative power of the theatrical sign. He also emphasizes the variety of signs in the theater deriving both from linguistic and non-linguistic systems of signification. The signs in the theater are rarely manifested in pure form, e.g. even a simple sentence "I like you" is accompanied by actors' movements and mimicry. For Kowzan, linguistics is the point of departure; consequently, he accepts the term "sign" in itself. Saussure's concepts of "signifiant" and "signifié," and the division of signs into natural and artificial ones. In his book, Littérature et spectacle (1975), he returns to the thirteen sign systems he had distinguished in his 1968 essay. Kowzan arrives at thirteen sign systems present simultaneously in the performance. They are said to form five bigger categories: "word" and "tone" belong the "the spoken text" (le texte prononcé); "mime," "gestures: and "actor's body movements" relate to the "expression of body" (l'expression corporelle); "make-up," "hair style" and "costume" create the "actor's external appearance" (apparences extérieures de l'acteur); the "accessories," "decor" and "lighting" are the "appearance of the stage" (l'aspect du lieu scènique); finally "music" and "sound effects" form the category of "inarticulate sounds" (l'effects sonores non articulés).

The most often manifested semiotic system is the "word" (la parole). Its analysis may be conducted on different levels: semantic, phonologic, prosodic, syntactic, etc. The way in which each of the word is pronounced adds semantic value; Kowzan calls this system of signs "tone" (le ton). One can easily notice that the same sentence can be expressed in an interrogative, exclamative or affirmative way. The accent and dialect (e.g. provincial, foreign) fall into this category. Kowzan passes to kinesic signs which include "la mimique du visage, le geste et le mouvement scénique de l'acteurs" and he claims that "la mimique du visage est un système de signes en principe spatio-temporels, c'est-à-dire créés dans l'espace mais subissant des changements dans le temps" (p. 186). "Gesture" (le geste) is a highly developed communicative system, "Les théoriciens du geste prétendent qu'il est possible de faire avec la main et le bras jusqu'à 700 000 signes (Sir Richard Paget)" (p. 187). The "gesture" system may substitute other systems,

> . . . gestes qui remplancent un élément du décor (mouvement du bras pour ouvrir une porte imaginaire), un élément du costume (chapau imaginaire), un accessoire ou des accessoires (jeu

> du pêcheur sans ligne, sans verse, sans poissons, sans eau), . . . des gestes qui expriment un sentiment, une émotion, enfin des gestes qui sont signes de politesse, du confort physique, etc. (p. 188)

The third kinesic system "movement" (le mouvement) consists of

> -places successives occupées par rapport aux autres acteurs, aux éléments du décor, aux specateures;
> -différentes façons de se déplacer (demarche lente, précipitée, vaillante, majestueuse, deplacement a pied, sur un char, en voiture, sur un brancard);
> -entrées et sorties
> -mouvements collectifs (p. 189).

For example, hesitant gait may be the sign of drunkenness and sudden stepping backward may embody reverence.

"Make-up" (le maquillage), the next sign system elaborated by Kowzan, relates together with mimicry to the physiognomy of the actor. It is based on natural signs (color of the lips, etc.), and it enables the audience to establish a type of character, e.g. "la femme fatale," "le bouffon," etc. The "make-up" may also present the character as contemporary or historical, etc. The theater uses mask (ancient Greek theater, "commedia dell'arte," Chinese theater) the function of which is to hide natural mimicry which otherwise is inseparable from speech. "Hair style" (la coiffure) is considered as a separate sign system; the wig, for example, signifies much more than make-up alone. It provides information about cultural and geographical conditions of a given period as well as the class origin of the character. Even the beard and the moustache reveal the age of the character and the style of the period. "Costume" (le costume) is the most conventional means of defining the character,

> . . . le costume peut signifier le sexe, l'âge, l'appartenance à une classe sociale, la profession, une position sociale ou hiérarchique particulière (roi, pape), la nationalité, la religion . . . (p. 195).

The costume provides information about the historical period, the weather and the taste of the character. On the other hand, it may also hide the true sex of the character, his profession or social position. "Accessory" (l'accessoire) is closely connected with costume (e.g. the stick and the bowler hat are immediately associated with an English gentleman) and the decor (e.g. painted sun). The accessories

> sont capables de désigner le lieu, le moment, une circonstance quelconque se rapportant aux personnages qui s'en servent (profession, goûts, intention), et c'est leur signification au deuxième degré. La lanterne allumée dans la main d'un valet veut dire qu'il fait . . . nuit. (p. 197)

"Decor" (le decor), which may be painted or built, characterizes the settings: geographically (mountain, the sea) or socially (café, palace) and signifies historical period, time of day and season:

> La fonction sémiologique du décor ne se borne pas aux signes impliqués dans ses éléments. Le mouvement des décors, la façon de les planter ou de les changer peuvent apporter des valeurs complémentaires ou autonomes: l'emploi de la scène tournante ou coulissante enrichit les possibilités sémiologiques du décor . . . (p. 199)

"Lighting" (l'éclairage) constitutes another autonomous sign system (introduced in the theater in the sixteenth century).

> Une fonction importante de l'éclairage consiste à pouvoir amplifier our modifier la valeur du geste, du mouvement, du décor, et même leur à ajouter une valeur sémiologique nouvelle." (p. 201)

The lighting also delimits the place of action and illuminates the actor's face or an accessory. "Music" (la musique) emerges as another important component of the spectacle whose semiotic function is unquestionable:

> En exprimant ou en suggérant une émotion, une humeur, un état d'âme la phrase musicale devient signe de l'enquiétude, de la hâte, de l'ironie, de l'allégresse ou de la tendresse. La musique est capable de jouer ce rôle aussi bien quand elle accompagne l'action dramatique qu'en dehors de l'action (précédant ou coupant le spectale, dans les entractes, comme interlude). (p. 168)

The most essential function of the music is to evoke atmosphere,

> Les associations rythmiques ou melodique liées à certains genres de music (menuet, march militaire, valse viennoise, cake walk, musique de cirque) peuvent servir à évoquer l'atmosphère, le lieu ou l'époque de l'action. (p. 202)

Even particular musical instruments are associated with certain periods, e.g. the trumpet and saxophone with jazz and the 1920s; and places, e.g. menuet with the court, military march with the army, etc. In the case of opera, the signs are emitted simultaneously on two levels: instrumental and vocal, and the semiotic significance becomes more complicated. The performance, apart from natural sounds, e.g. creaking floors, etc. is rich in sounds which accompany other sign systems and are manifested in a number of ways:

> Le champ sémiologique du bruitage est aussi vaste, et peut-être plus vaste encore, que l'univers des bruits dans la vie. Les bruits produits au théâtre sont capable d'indiquer l'heure (coups de l'horlage), le temps qu'il fait (pluie), le lieu (bruits de grande ville, cris de oiseaux, voix des animaux domestiques), le déplacement (voiture qui s'approche au s'éloigne) . . . (p. 170)

Kowzan classifies all those noises under the term "sound effects" (le bruitage) which seems the most diverse category. The noise effects are achieved by various means: human voice, mechanical devices, and tapes which also enable the reconstruction of natural noises.

All theatrical signs can be subdivided into big groups: "auditory signs" (signes auditifs) and "visual signs" (signes visuels); thus, the word, tone, music and sound effects constitute the group of auditory signs while all remaining signs form the category of visual signs. In the category of auditory signs there appear signs emitted by the actor (words, tone) and independent of him (music, special effects); similarly, it is possible to distinguish visual signs associated with the actor (mime, gesture, body movements, make-up, hair style, costume) and the other group related to the accessories, the decor and lighting. Though Kowzan stresses the importance of the sizes of objects appearing on stage, he fails to discuss the significance of color in the visual sign systems. He is correct in pointing out the flexibility of various sign systems when they replace each other, e.g. the actor may "play" the role of the decor or the element of the decor may replace the costume. The number of signs perceived in relation to the signs emitted varies according to the general culture of the spectator, his knowledge of the code and his capacity of concentration. The spectacle offers the prodigality of various signs and the audience has to choose the most important ones in order to comprehend the performance. The analysis of sign systems present in theatrical performance leads Kowzan to the following definition: "l'unité sémiologique du spectacle est une tranche contenant tous les signes émis simultanément, tranche dont la durée est égale au signe qui dure le moins" (p. 215). Such a proposition, however, posits the question of determining the duration of each separate element; in practice, it is hardly possible to mark the "boundaries" of each message. Though Kowzan's classification is not all-embracing, it seems satisfactory in bringing order into the polysemic and ambiguous domain of theatrical signs.

3. Typology of Theatrical Codes

In Le mots et les gestes, A. Helbo argues that "La notion de code est au centre d'une rhétorique du théâtre."[25] The very term "code" calls for a differentiation of criteria. In a very general sense the term "code" may be reminiscent of a famous Saussurian distinction between langue and parole; the langue being the set of principles enabling the construction and the consequent deconstruction of meaning (a code per se) while the parole relates to any phenomenon created by the application of the rules in practice. Thus langue may refer to a set of theatrical conventions in general while parole will equate any theatrical performance put on stage. Needless to say, such a classification could only serve as a point of departure for a further elaboration.

Theatrical meaning is polyvalent; i.e., the text in the theater can be interpreted in numerous ways. The text enters the stage as a coded message (expression) and reaches the audience through visual and acoustic channels. The audience, in turn, decodes the text as content and in this way establishes the meaning of the play. The interpretation of the text varies depending on the general knowledge of the spectator. If a European tourist visiting China decided to see a performance by the Peking Opera and he was not acquainted with the significance of certain details (e.g. costume color or ornamentation) he would not be able to decipher one or more of the many encoded meanings of the text. If he knew the theatrical convention of the period it might facilitate the interpretation process but still would not enable the complete decoding of the message. It becomes evident theater the reconstruction of the meaning of the theatrical text is conditioned by the knowledge of cultural systems.

The theatrical code should be regarded as historically conditioned phenomenon because it realizes different sign systems under specific political, cultural and social conditions. To understand this, it is important to realize that the theater develops along an historical axis and draws on aesthetic conventions of previous epochs. Different signs dominate the theater at different periods. Thus, for example, in the Greek theater the use of masks eliminated mimic signs, while in Stanislavsky's theater, "mime" became the crucial element of the theatrical codes. The nineteenth century bourgeois theater concentrated on verbal codes, while pantomime theater abandons them completely. The sign systems mentioned above pertained to the theater, but there are other sign repertoires that derive from a diverse cultural background. It is important to realize that cultural systems must be known in order to understand the meaning of the code's operation during the performance. One, for example, should be able to recognize a ballad form of a poem in order to associate it with an early Romantic period or the technique of painting used by an Impressionist in order to associate the objects seen on stage with the proper time period. The spectator must differentiate between a Roman temple and a Gothic cathedral in order to place the action in Antiquity or Middle Ages, respectively. Cultural codes pervade the performance of the theater of the Far East; for example, in the Japanese Noh theater or in the Peking Opera, the costume or pieces of decor carry additional cultural connotations which, if identified, definitely enhance the meaning of the play. The theater is an open construct which combines typically theatrical signs as well as signs originating in other aesthetic realms and this multiplies the possibilities of interpretation. In L'école du spectateur, A. Ubersfeld draws attention to the creative aspect of sign interaction:

> Le théâtre étant une pratique artistique, le processus de construction de signes iconiques est bien un processus d'institution de code: la mise en scène se sent bien des codes existants (code théâtrale, code perceptif), mais change aussi les conditions de fonctionnement de ces codes; de la, la création de codes nouveaux.[26]

The total meaning of the play is thus generated as a result of an interaction of various "theatrical" and "non-theatrical" codes which enrich the meaning of the play by their combinatorial possibilities.

This raises the important issue of the competence of the audience in the theater (or the reader of the dramatic text). The reader of the novel has to be equipped with a linguistic competence, that is, he has to know the phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactical rules of the language in order to understand the message of the author. In the theater, linguistic competence would not suffice to enable the decoding of a complex dramatic structure. In order to understand its gamut of meanings the audience has to possess the broader semiotic competence including

> knowledge of the pragmatic rules of linguistic interaction (so-called conversation rules), the

> ability to use language for given communicative ends, the capacity for producing appropriate utterances adapted to their context, awareness of social and deictic roles, and mastery of the non-linguistic semiotic systems necessarily involved in the communication exchange (gestural, proxemic, etc.)[27]

For example, the information "there is somebody at the door" can be conveyed by means of a verbal reference, knock, door bell or gesturally by pointing at the door. The high degree of heterogeneity of sign systems communicating the message in the theater accounts for the difficulties regarding a clear-cut segmentation into particular systems. Theatrical codes may clash with the codes originating in cultural systems and the signs may replace one another, for example, a piece of wood can be horse, a gesture can be made an umbrella, etc. This characteristic, considered by the Prague School as the most typical of the theatrical sign, reflects the high flexibility of theatrical sign systems and creates additional difficulties in their interpretation. Furthermore, the signs of one system may strengthen, weaken, neutralize or contradict one another. Generally speaking, the receiver (an audience) is able to decode the text only when he is familiar with other texts and can identify the references to them in the studied text. In the case of the theatrical text, the reference frame is much richer as the theater draws on many unrelated areas of culture.

Theatrical discourse is characterized by its density of signs. The audience is required to assimilate information consisting of various signs and coming through different channels which are more or less operative during the performance. The message is communicated along one temporal axis and three spatial ones. Movement relies on three-dimensionality while linguistic utterances are rooted in temporality. From the synchronic point of view, theater analysis draws attention to "semiotic density" while the diachronic perspective of the theatrical text is dominated by the discontinuity of different systems, e.g., the message may be communicated by the acoustic channel solely, or by acoustic and visual channels simultaneously, etc. The specificity of a theatrical text, then, is related to its semiotic density, heterogeneity and temporal and spatial discontinuity. Consequently, the problem arises in regard to the nature of possible codes that the spectator should have at his disposal in order to decode the message encoded in the text.

P. Pavis, a distinguished theoretician of the theater and the author of Languages of the Stage, distinguishes three kinds of codes: "specific," "non-specific" and "mixed."[28] Among the "specific" codes he distinguishes general conventions of the performance and conventions pertaining to historical periods, genres or character types. The general conventions of the performance deal with certain specific rules, e.g., it is generally accepted that the actors represent certain fictional characters or historical figures. The conventions of particular historical periods clarify whether the play is set e.g., in Roman times or the Restoration era, other conventions differentiate vaudeville from tragedy in terms of genre and still other conventions make it clear that the dramatis persona is a harlequin type or a Tartuffe. The "non-specific" codes, remarks Pavis, are quite diverse codes which include all rules enabling the spectator to detect the values of the content of the play. This rich category accompanies cultural and linguistic codes as well as the code of perception. The classification boundaries blur even more when "mixed codes" appear as a result of the use of a "non-theatrical" code in a theatrical situation. The theatrical text, then, is composed of heterogeneous semiotic systems and any interpretation of the text in terms of codes should establish "a priority code" among other codes, their mutual interrelations and the area of interaction between textuality and iconicity. The Theater of the Absurd eliminates the clear boundary lines among the codes, and, as a result, different aberrant codes arise which deter the process of decodification by the receiver. The application of this classification in the analysis of the Theater of the Absurd would not be very fruitful.

The classification proposed by K. Elam in The Semiotics of Theater and Drama[29] represents a step forward. Elam classifies theatrical codes in contrast to dramatic codes and roots the opposition in diverse cultural codes. In this way he arrives at the following levels of organization: systemic, linguistic, generic, intertextual, textual, structural, formal representational, epistemic, aesthetic, logical, behavioral, ethical, ideological, and psychological. Even though it seems a thorough classification, the taxonomy lacks clear-cut boundaries among systems, e.g. within the linguistic codes Elam distinguishes phonetic-phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, rhetorical, para-linguistic, dialectical, and idiolectal levels, each of which represents a certain system. Elam, however, uses the name "systemic" for another group of codes; namely, kinesic, proxemic, vestimentary, cosmetic, pictorial, musical, and architectural codes. The distinctions among various groups of codes seem rather vague. Elam's typology, although detailed and seemingly all-embracing, occasionally contains some inaccuracies.

In contrast to Pavis, Ubersfeld does not abandon the linguistic dimension of theater semiosis. She insists that the performance consists of two sets of signs, "ensemble articulé en deux sous-ensembles, le texte T et la représentation P."[30] Therefore, in her taxonomy of codes, she includes "codes proprement theateraux (spatial-scènique, de jeu, etc., codifiant la représentation à un certain moment de l'histoire)" as well as "code linguistique," "perceptifs (visuel, auditif)" and "socioculturel ('bienséances,' 'vraisemblance,' 'psychologie,' etc.)."[31] It is clear that Ubersfeld, like Elam, distinguishes the realm of a specifically theatrical phenomenon (performance) and the other category (linguistic, perceptive and sociological codes), but she fails to provide a distinguishing criterion.

The most lucid classification of codes in the theater is presented by E. Fischer-Lichte in her article about theatrical communication. She considers a code an indispensable factor of theatrical communication and defines it as a set of rules which state

> 1. which material elements count as meaning-carrying entities, as signs,
> 2. which of these signs can combine with each other, and under what circumstances,
> 3. which meaning can be attributed to these signs
>   a) in precise, definite syntagmata,
>   b) when taken apart individually.[32]

Any application of these codes would only lead to the creation of a theatrical performance. The code has to be known by producers as well as by receivers, otherwise theatrical communication would not succeed. As it has been previously pointed out, a European watching the Peking Opera would have to be acquainted with the specific code in order to fully understand it. Fischer-Lichte points out that in the history of European theater, there appeared strict conventions regarding the representation of emotions in the Baroque theater. There were specific rules regarding facial expressions and gesture with respect to the emotion being described.

The second group of codes existing in the theater derives from the primary systems of culture. As primary systems, Fischer-Lichte understands language and paralanguage, the system of facial expression, clothing, make-up, hairdressing, gesture and movement of objects and buildup. In other words, the theater combines specifically theatrical signs with the signs existing in surrounding cultural systems. Therefore, only the spectators who know what a secret agent looks like (coat, glasses, briefcase) will be able to recognize him. Generally, costume is a powerful code enabling the identification of a dramatis persona with respect to historical period, profession, sex, etc. The manner of house furnishing also provides a lot of information about the epoch and the social class of its inhabitants. Thus it is possible to conclude that knowledge of primary cultural systems is the most significant pre-condition of understanding the meaning of a theatrical performance. Thus category of theatrical codes was particularly common in the realist and naturalist theater and was assured by the homogeneity of the producers and the audience recruited mainly from the middle class.

The main category of theatrical code refers to the knowledge of secondary cultural systems. Such systems are, for instance, poetry, music, painting, theater, film, myth, religion, and other social institutions. Each of these systems, although always closely related to the others, has a tradition of its own and, accordingly, has developed a special repertoire of signs and possible meanings (p. f7). Fischer-Lichte provides an excellent example of the significance of the secondary cultural system, religion, in the interpretation of a medieval miracle play. These plays were based on Catholic liturgy; consequently, the spectators originating from a wide gamut of social standings would always understand the meaning of the play as long as they possessed the knowledge of the religious signs. Theatrical communication was successful by means of the signs of the secondary system. The author of Theatrical Communication concludes that most often we have to deal with "various forms of transition between these three codes with prevailing reference to one of them" (p. f9). She connects the prevalence of one system to the historical period of specific cultural, social, moral and aesthetic conditions. It is interesting to note that Pavis, Ubersfeld and Fischer-Lichte fail to consider codes related to the use of space in the theater. Space in the theater is a much more complicated phenomenon than in the case of narrative. In narrative, language is usually the only medium transmitting space and it indicates two kinds of space: one is the text of the narrative itself, and the other is the language of the narrative which enables the reader to visualize the space of the action. In the case of theater, the action of the play unfolds in front of the audience which justifies the first two categories of theatrical space; that is, space on stage and space off stage. Moreover, the characters of the play often describe events happening off the stage referring to the space which is invisible both to them and the spectators. In "Space and Reference in Drama," M. Issacharoff distinguishes three main areas of space:

1. Theatrical space (i.e., architectural design)
2. Stage space (i.e., the stage and set design)
3. Dramatic space (space used by an individual dramatist).[33]

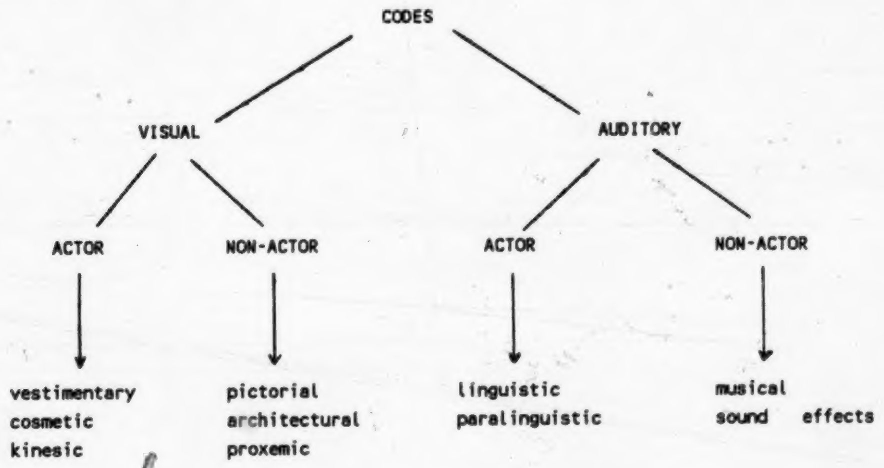
In the context of my analysis, the third type of theatrical space will be of interest, that is, dramatic space. Issacharoff distinguishes between two kinds of it: mimetic and diegetic. "Mimetic space," he explains, "is that which is made visible to an audience and represented on stage. Diegetic space, on the other hand, is described, that is, referred to by the character." In other words, "mimetic space is transmitted directly, while diegetic space is mediated through the discourse of the characters, and thus communicated verbally, not visually" (p. 215).

The iconoclasm of Jarry, Apollinaire, Witkiewicz and Artaud also became evident in their experimentation with theatrical space. As has been indicated in the previous chapter, their basic premise was the departure from realism in the theater. Jarry definitely rejects any detailed realistic stage direction setting his play "in Poland," which is to say, "Nowhere." The few references to the appearance of the stage include "a room in Pa Ubu's house," "the King's palace," "a cave in the mountains," "a peasant's cottage," "a dungeon," "the crypt of the old kings of Poland," "a marketplace," the snow-covered province of Livonia," and "the bridge of a ship." All of them are devoid of any realistic description and indicate in the least informative manner where the action is to take place. Jarry's rejection of realistic decor is followed by Apollinaire's open declaration about the unimportance of realism in the theater. The most revolutionary approach to space in the theater is presented by A. Artaud in Le théâtre et son double where he proposes the idea of the audience seated in the middle and the actors playing around them as well as the total abandonment of decor.

On stage the heterogeneity of the theatrical sign is translated into a multimedial process of semiosis. A variety of messages passes through different channels simultaneously and each of them has its own spatio-temporal make-up. Apparently the number of codes coming into existence at the level of the performance depends on the number of signs being evoked on stage. The number of signs, of course, differs from performance to performance, depending on the cultural framework of the epoch. The previously presented classifications of theatrical codes tend to focus on the primary and secondary systems of signification and ignore the medium communicating the variety of theatrical signs. They will be less stressed in my study. In the present analysis it will be emphasized that the type of code will be closely related with the channel it operates through. Consequently, all types of codes will fall into two basic categories:

optical and acoustic modalities of perception. Both categories will be further subdivided into two groups: one pertaining to the actor (Actor) and the other not related to the actor (Non-Actor). Recent research in theater semiotics indicates that the study of spatial relations conditioned by kinesic interrelations should not be ignored. Having accepted Kowzan's classification of theatrical signs, it is necessary to amend my classification of codes by adding codes related to space.

The taxonomy of codes presented below briefly relates to the categories distinguished by Kowzan in his typology of theatrical signs. Generally, all codes in my medium-anchored classification can be divided into visual and auditory. Furthermore, each group can be sub-divided into the "Actor" and "Non-Actor" category. Thus, the "Actor" category consists of the vestimentary, cosmetic and kinesic codes. The vestimentary code relates to the systems of "costume"; the cosmetic code deals with the systems of "hair style" and "make-up"; and the kinesic code is associated with the systems of "mime," "gesture" and "movement." The "Non-Actor" category of codes deals with the systems of signs relating to the stage. The architectural code relates to the system of "decor"; the pictorial code deals with the system of "accessory"; and the proxemic code pertains to the spatial relations; so it deals, partially, with the system of "lighting" as well as "decor" and "accessory." The audience not only perceives what is happening on stage, but also receives acoustic stimuli. Therefore, the second category of theatrical codes, the auditory one, can be, by analogy, subdivided into "Actor" and "Non-Actor" category. In the "Actor" category there exist two fundamental codes: linguistic which is related to the system of the "word" and paralinguistic which refers to the way of articulation and intonation of utterances, the "tone." In the "Non-Actor" category there are two types of codes: musical and sound effects. Consequently, my classification can be presented as follows:



Although this code classification is probably not all-inclusive, it seems consistent with the previously adopted system of theatrical signs which are, in turn, translated through visual and auditory channels by means of various codes.

4. The Process of Communication in the Theater

Even though it has been accepted previously that the theater will be analyzed as a communication process, the very status of theatrical communication has caused a lot of perplexity. Linguists and semioticians have been unable to come to complete agreement on this issue. Before I discuss theatrical communication, I shall indicate that some semioticians have denied the very existence of communication in the theater. The most radical view is represented by Eric Buyssens in La communication et l'articulation linguistique where he asserts that, "Les acteurs au théâtre simulent les personnages réels qui communiquent entre eux, ils ne communiquent pas avec le public" and is by G. Mounin's assertion that the most important factor in the communication process is that "l'émitteur peut devenir à son tour le recépteur; et le recépteur, émeteur. Absolument rien de tel au théâtre où les émetteurs-acteurs restent toujours les même et les récepteurs-spectateurs toujours les mêmes aussi."[34] Mounin claims that communication in the theater does not exist because it is not reversible:

> Si l'on veut savoir ce qu'on dit quand on parle de communication, rappelons avec obstination, qu'un émetteur (de messages) communique avec un récepteur de ces messages si celui-ci peut répondre au premier par le même canal, dans le même code. Il n'y a pas de communication de ce type au théâtre . . . (p. 91)

Retaining reversibility as one criterion of the process of communication, Mounin emphasizes the other indispensible criterion: intentionality. He accepts linguistics as a point of departure:

> la linguistique a mis en lumière les fonction du language et . . . valorisé comme centrale la fonction de communication. Cela a conduit Buyssens et d'autres linguistes a bien distinguer les faits qui relèvent d'une intention de communication." (p. 68)

Mounin's understanding of the act of communication involves a sender's intention to transmit a message, the receiver's perception of this intention and the influence of the message on the behavior of the interlocuter. The author declares that "En fait, il semble bien qu'on explique mieux ce qui se passe au théâtre en termes de stimulation (dans le sens que les psychologues donnent à cet mot) qu'en termes de communication" (p. 92). He compares Pavlovian reflexes to stimuli produced on stage "linguistiques, visuels, lumineux, gestuels, plastiques" which do not resemble any communication process.

André Helbo responds with an excellent critique of Mounin's views in his article entitled "The Semiology of the Theater or: the Communication Swamped."[35] He asserts that

> Stimulation would thus be categorized as a conative function, of which the least one can say is that it is not contrary to communication. Moreover . . . it postulates the superimposition of intellection of the sign with a pragmatic reaction to the stimulus--a superimposition inherent to the perlocutionary value of the signal. (The word danger, for example, is perceived as a sign and provokes a behavior . . .) (p. 106)

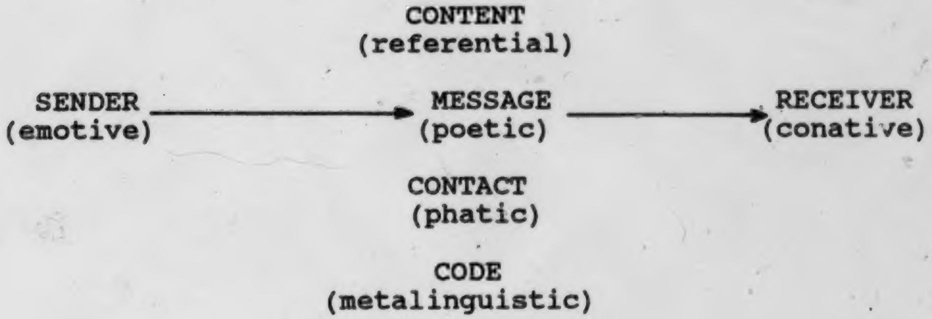
In other words, the receiver manifests his understanding of the sign by the way he behaves. In order to respond in any way to what is happening on the stage the spectator has to utilize cultural codes in the process which is semiotic in nature. The audience watching a storm on the stage and hearing thunder realizes it is not real, but produced in some mechanical manner. However, the audience is aware of these conventions which have been accepted as a basis of theatrical illusion. This attracts the realm of the semiotic. G. Mounin insists that the sender and the receiver use the same codes in a communicative act. Helbo analyzes the set which, in his opinion, communicates to the audience the form and content of the location where the text and performance acquire their meaning. His analysis shows that a communication process occurs although it takes place under conditions which contradict Mounin's definition:

> -even though sender and receiver are familiar with each other's codes, it does not follow that their codes are identical
> -as Franco Ruffini notes, "communication on the part of one of the interlocutors can be limited to the phatic function . . . which in general utilizes a different code from that of the other interlocuter."
> -it is entirely possible that the receiver misses a certain meaning which is expressed in the set. This does not mean that the intention to communication was absent. (p. 108)

In conclusion, Mounin's reservations regarding intentionality, reversibility, and the uniformity of codes used by the participants in the communication process should not by any means suffice to discard the concept of communication in the theater. On the contrary, the theater enters the realm of communication acts because it consists of signs intentionally transmitted between senders (actors) and receivers (spectators) (and vice-versa) which stress the emotive, conative, and phatic functions.

Mounin's approach has been rejected by subsequent theater semiologists, who have argued that the audience can only respond to a performance on the basis of some understanding of what is happening, and that the understanding can only be achieved by the application of various cultural codes. Even if the audience receives the message and decodes it, the meaning of the message may differ from the meaning encoded by the sender. The difference in meaning thus created does not preclude the existence of the communication process. The meaning of any work of art can be understood in various ways and the inherent ambiguity may only demand the utilization of a wider gamut of codes. The concept of communication in the theater used by Mounin has been criticized not only by A. Helbo and F. Ruffini but also by E. Fischer-Lichte in "Theatrical Communication."[36] She regards theatrical communication as "a special mode of aesthetic communication" which should be understood as "processes of meaning constituting" (p. f1). What it means is that "the producer of a work of art selects, realizes and combines different signs in order to create a special meaning, and the receiver of it interprets these signs as well as their selection and combination in order to constitute its meaning, for his part" (p. f1). Subsequently, she emphasizes that the meaning of the signs used has to be shared between producers and receivers and "theatrical communication can take place only between producers and receivers living at the same time" (p. f2). Only when those conditions are fulfilled does theatrical communication come into existence; otherwise, it cannot take place. E. Fischer-Lichte stresses the common knowledge of signs used, creativity and immediacy of the communication process. Finally, Fischer-Lichte places the theater in a wider cultural framework and argues that the communication process in the theater should be analyzed with respect to political, social, economic, religious, moral and aesthetic conditions.

General models of communication drive from cybernetics. Linguists have been fascinated by information theory because of its potential contribution to their discipline. One of the first linguists to transfer concepts of information theory to linguistic analysis was R. Jakobson. He distinguishes six basic functions which can be illustrated by means of the following diagram:



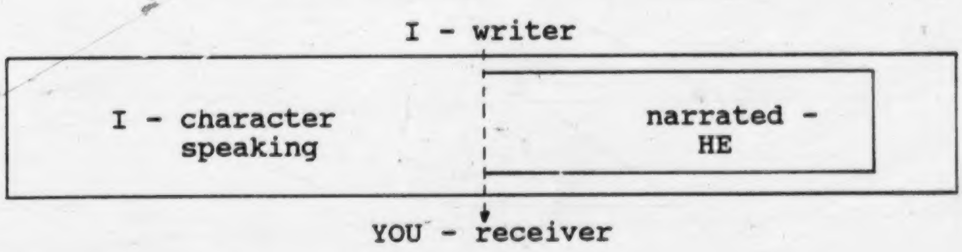
A. Ubersfeld claims that the specificity of the theater is expressed in the twofold status of utterance:

> . . . une double *situation de communication*, a) la situation théâtrale ou plus précisément *scénique* où les émetteurs sont le scripteur et les praticiens (metteur en scène, comédiens, etc.), b) la situation *représentée*, celle qui se construit entre les personnages.[37]

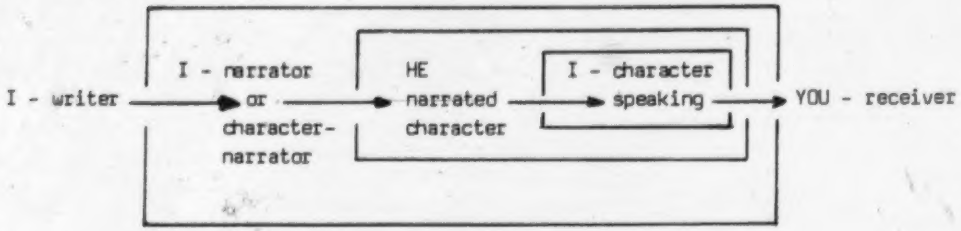
In the theater, the six functions elaborated by R. Jakobson can be analyzed in the light of the basic dichotomy between "situation scénique" and "situation représentée."

At the level of "la situation scénique" the sender can be the author, stage manager, director or actor and the receiver is multiple: the audience. The emotive function dominates this scenario. The author produces a macro-sign (the dramatic text) which is brought to life by the director. The director modifies it by weaving a signifying pattern out of the actors' performance and the set. Thus the actors and the stage director are assigned a clear emotive function. The receiver is the audience which cannot respond by the same means and, consequently, the conative function is dimmed. The phatic function refers to the basic situation of contact between the actors and the spectators and is fundamental for the communication process. The referential function, focusing on the context, seems to be significant for the set (informing about historical or social conditions). The message-oriented poetic function is, generally, much less pronounced in the theater than in poetry. Finally, the metalinguistic function is probably least manifested as the actors and the audience never really use the same code. In the case of "la situation représentée" basic changes occur at the poles of the scheme: the actor becomes a sender and the other actor becomes a receiver (the process is reversible). The transformation sheds more light on the emotive, conative and phatic functions and moves the poetic, referential and metalinguistic functions into a shade. In conclusion, while in the case of "la situation représentée" the traditional emotive, conative and phatic functions dominate; in the case of "la situation scénique" the Theater of the Absurd draws attention to the referential and phatic functions.

The communication model of theater semiosis, based on linguistic theory, with a clearly defined sender, message and receiver, is definitely adequate to describe the complexity of theatrical communication. Therefore, some semiologists have looked for parallels between the theater and the novel and based their studies on the findings of narratology. The point of departure is the thesis that both the theater and the novel present a series of actions connected by causal relationships. There are, however, important differences; one of them is delineated by Aristotle and deals with the basic distinction between mimesis (drama) and diegesis (narrative). The theater is characterized by the physical presence of the actors and the physical nature of the stage. Moreover, what the audience observes on the stage unfolds during a time span which is analogous to that of the utterances which make it up. Bearing the distinction in mind, C. Segre points out three characteristics of theatrical communication: Firstly, theatrical communication (sender-receiver line) cuts vertically through the horizontal communication between the characters (I-You):[38]



In contrast to the theatrical communication scheme, the narrative communication is presented as follows:



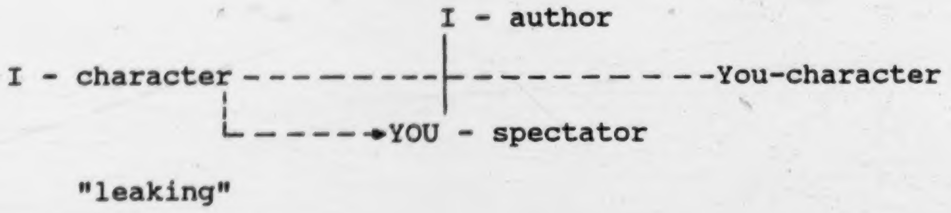
It becomes clear from the above diagrams that in narration HE is superimposed on I, that is, different "I"s of the character's discourses appear within HE. In the theater, however, it is "I"s that constitute theatrical text so I is superimposed on HE. The disappearance of a superimposed HE is the source of mimesis. The second characteristic of theatrical communication is the identity of discourse-time and utterance-time:

> Dramatic action always unfolds in the present . . . ., the present moves on and is transformed into the past, but as such is no longer present. The present passes, effecting a change, and from its antithesis a new and different present comes into being. The passage of time within the drama is an absolute succession of "present moments." (p. 42)

While narrative concentrates on the events of the past, drama focuses on those of the present. Thirdly, in the diegetic text the superimposed HE "is also an expedient for judging the statements of different "I"s. In the theater we know no more than we see, or what the characters say they think and want." (p. 43) This is, however, not always true as prologues and printed programs can provide additional information.

Moreover, the characters may speak about others who are not present on the stage. The absence of mediation by the writer in the theater generates various interpretations of the same spectacle by the members of the audience. The spectators become embedded within the modelling system of the theater. They judge the performance and express approval or condemnation. As participants, though not personally involved, the receivers in the theater are much more involved in theatrical action than the readers of other texts.

Segre in "A Contribution to the Semiotics of the Theater" contributes to the semiotic research of the theater by drawing attention to the process of "leaking" information to the public. To the horizontal communication between characters and vertical communication between author and spectator there is thereby added a further "oblique" communication between characters and spectators:



Such "leaks" provide additional information about characters or action and they facilitate the process of interpretation for the audience. Although soliloquies have become outdated in modern theater, direct addresses to the public by a character are not uncommon in the Theater of the Absurd, e.g. in "La cantatrice chauve" and "El cepillo de dientes." Segre makes an excellent observation when he asserts that "leaking serves to compensate the lack of direct communication between I-author and YOU-spectator (p. 47). In sum, Segre draws a model of theatrical communication based on narratology introducing, however, the peculiar features of theatrical discourse, the identity of discourse-time and utterance-time, and the increased role of spectators which emphasizes the pragmatic realm of theatrical communication.

The extreme heterogeneity of multimedial theater communication is best captured by F. Poyatos:

> In sum, the creator of flesh-and-bone characters is striving to put in motion two main sign-emitting complexes; first, the mutually inherent bodily message-conveying systems, the core of which constitutes the Basic Triple Structure of human communication, language-paralanguage-kinesics, the basic of nonverbal research; and secondly, rest of the bodily systems, all of which transmit information between sender and receiver through kinetic (generating language, paralanguage and kinesics), chemical, dermal, olfactory, gustatory, thermal and kinesthetic receptors, either simultaneously or individually.[39]

The term "Basic Triple Structure of Human Communication" requires some explanation. Poyatos distinguishes three fundamental elements of the process: language which he defines as "words and the prosodic features," paralanguage and kinesics. Paralanguage consists of voice modification and non-lexical vocal sounds which are co-present with facial expressions and kinesic behavior. Paralanguage is made up of primary qualities, qualifiers, alternants and differentiators. "Primary qualities, so essential on the stage, are: timbre (permanent voice register), resonance (oral-nasal), volume, tempo, pitch level, intonation range (melodious-monotonous) and general rhythm of speech (regular and smooth-irregular and jerky)" (p. 327). Poyatos describes qualifiers as:

> respiratory control (ingressive in expressions of terror, fear, etc.), glottis control (whispering, murmuring), laryngeal control (creaky, breathy voice), velar control (oral-nasal), pharyngeal control (hollow, throaty or guttural, snorting, husky, hoarse, etc.), articulatory tension (lax, tense), articulatory control (clear-slurred) . . . Some of these may, of course, be also permanent qualities in one's voice set . . . (p. 328)

Alternants include in English: "Aha, Ahem, Er, Ha, Ha-ha, Hem, Hum, H'm, Hep, Hip, Hist, Ho, Hump, Ooph, Poof, Poosh, Psst, Pugh, Shoo, Tsk, Ugh, Uh-huh, Oh-uh" (p. 329). Alternants occur frequently in daily conversations and may be least perceived by the audience, but nevertheless, they can provide information about the personality of the character and his social status. Finally, differentiators constitute the last component of paralanguage. They play an important role in the theater because they reflect the psychological state of the characters. "Differentiators have been identified as laughter, crying, sighing, coughing, yawning, sneezing, belching, hiccoughing, snorting, snuffing and different degrees of whispering and shouting, all while speaking" (p. 328). Poyatos points out important semantic function of differentiators; for example, laughter may denote "affiliation, bond-forming, love, tension-relief, comicality, and happiness, aggression, mocking, seduction and deception, each with different phonetic and kinesic qualifiers" (p. 329).

Kinesics is the last element of the Basic Triple Structure of Human Communication. Poyatos offers the following definition of kinesics:

> The systematic study of the conscious and unconscious psychomuscularly-based body movements and intervening or resulting still positions, either learned or somatogenic, of visual, visual-acoustic and tactile or kinesthetic perception, that, whether isolated or combined with the linguistic and paralinguistic structures and with other semantic and objectual behavioral systems, possess intended or unintended communicative value. (p. 191)

In theater actor and director shape the kinesic activity of the character. Kinesic expressions are coupled with the vocal aspect of performance and modify the process of decoding. After all, the spectators perceive an amalgam of kinesic and vocal elements of theatrical message. It is possible to watch a theater devoid of vocal elements (pantomime), but it is not possible to even imagine a theater without the kinesic behavior. Kinesics may become a source of faulty interpretation of the message. As language and paralanguage can be more or less adequately translated into a different language, kinesic behavior (e.g. gestures) requires a careful re-coding. Directors have to bear in mind that some cultures (cultural codes) activate different gestures in the same situation which may lead to a confusion in the reception process.

Characters come to life in the theater through language, paralanguage, kinesics and proxemic shifts on the stage. Proxemics, studied in detail by the anthropologist E. Hall, is defined by Poyatos in the following manner: "People's conception, use and structuration of space, from their built or natural surroundings to the distances consciously or unconsciously maintained in personal interaction" (p. 204). E. Hall's observations on how space communicates may be of some interest in the field of the theater. "Spatial changes," writes the author of The Silent Language, "give a tone to a communication, accent it, and at times even override the spoken word. The flow and shift of distance between people as they interact with each other is part and parcel of the communication process."[40] The statement seems like a seed from which the discipline of proxemics has evolved. Recent studies in proxemics illustrate how important spatial relations become in communication processes not only in anthropology but also in the theater.

E. Hall distinguished four basic distances in human interaction: public (from far phase to 12 feet), social (from 12 to 4 feet), personal (from 4 to 1.5 feet) and intimate (from 6 to 16 inches to total contact between bodies). Poyatos adds two more: far distance (e.g. waving at a rescue helicopter) and objectual distance which

> people keep from their objectual world, specifically from elements of the built environment like walls and fences . . ., the natural environment, like trees and rocks, or furniture, which determines an important part of our environmental interaction, as with desks (behind which we take positions of defence, superiority or aggressiveness, and on which we tap, scribble, flick off imaginary lint, lean on or collapse out of exhaustion).[41]

For the purposes of theatrical communication I will be interested mainly in personal, intimate and objectual distances which reveal personality traits of the characters as well as cultural context.

Poyatos's broad anthropological approach to the phenomenon of communication finds a fertile soil in the field of the theater. It is important to delineate two distinct dimensions of theatrical communication: one, coming into existence through the verbal-vocal exchanges occurring during the performance complemented by non-vocal and non-verbal activities and, the other, the verbal-vocal ones as manifested in the text of the play. In this model of theatrical communication Poyatos introduces the category of reader and director which multiplies the process of decoding and delimits five different levels: "author-reader, author-actor, author-director, author-spectator and actor-spectator." (p. 326) In fact, two more levels including director-actor and director-spectator may be added. The function of the director in the theater can be compared to the function of a narrator in the novel in the sense that the director mediates the message encoded by the author to the spectators. The director's handling of the characters determines their final physico-psychological make up. It is also important to emphasize that the dramatis personae will never be identical because in the process of creating the physico-psychological portrait each of the participants in the communication chain is influenced by his own culture and personality which determines the use of various codes. Undoubtedly, the actor is left with the least freedom of choice while the playwright can dwell on an unlimited number of multisensory and intellectual concepts.

Before I discuss the model of theatrical communication presented by Poyatos, I should deal with one case of a short-circuited communication which occurs when the play is simply read. The multimedial message encoded by the dramatist undergoes channel reduction by means of a visual code and is, in turn, decoded by the reader from the verbal text and stage directions. The reader's decoding of the text leads to the re-creation of the author's varied sensorial and intellectual experiences. The reader's interpretation ends at the process of decoding, but the director, who is initially a reader himself, does not only decode the message, but also encodes it again in his message to the actors. As we all know plays are written to be eventually staged and performance itself becomes the source of a true theatrical experience. Therefore, I now turn to the full model of theatrical communication:

1 PLAYWRIGHT	2 READER	3 DIRECTOR	4 ACTOR	5 SPECTATOR
decoding-encoding	decoding	decoding-encoding	decoding-encoding	decoding
TEXT	SCRIPT	STAGE COPY	PERFORMANCE	
multisensory and intellectual perception of reality	directions for verbal and non-verbal stage action	language paralanguage silence kinesics proxemics	visual acoustic proxemic relationship	

(p. 232)

The chart outlines five basic stages of theatrical communication. The first phase occurs when the playwright makes a selection of verbal and non-verbal signs and encodes them in his message (text). Various multisensory and intellectual experiences are transformed into a verbal message. The author has come to encode both verbal and non-verbal behaviors of his characters and reduce the variety of channels through which he perceives signs into the medium of the printed page. This channel reduction constitutes the second stage of the communication. The next phase in the transmission of the character and his world manifests itself in the reader's (director's) decoding of the text, "a fascinating counter-metamorphosis whereby the author's mental images of sensorial and intellectual experiences are brought back to life as we interpret the printed page." (p. 323) Directors, as a matter of principle, do not try to represent the author's "original intentions," but offer their own version, even deformation of the original. Thus, the "text" is frequently a "pre-text." The reader's cultural and historical background modifies and shapes the final outcome of the character and his world. The script's change from its written form through the stage copy (rehearsal) into performance is accompanied by channel amplification as there appear additional concurrent nonverbal activities as well as sensorial and intelligible context. The fourth stage is reached when the set of verbal and non-verbal messages is transformed into a pretended reality. At this stage the variety of signs, previously reduced to a visual-non-vocal medium, pour along optical and acoustic channels, generating meaning through the Basic Triple Structure and proxemic shifts on stage. The process of communication expands and, in the final fifth stage, embraces the audience. The spectators are the "ultimate decoders of the playwright's characters" (p. 325). The message they receive is the most complete, though highly mediated, version; it is a compilation of the director's and actors' decoding of the text and their own encoding of it into a visual-acoustic-proxemic complex. The process of communication ends at this stage for Poyatos. I would like to add a feedback reaction from the audience to the actors; the stage which is distinguished by Helbo and Fischer-Lichte.

This feedback reaction is frequently reduced to the acoustic channel (the actors may be able to perceive some gestures from the spectators sitting in the first rows, but this reaction would not reflect the overall response of the audience) and is delivered by means of paralanguage mostly. Thus, the most common differentiators to be used by the audience would be applause, laughing, booing, whistling or crying and sighing. Another element that is missing from Poyatos's model is the communication among the spectators themselves during the performance. The spectators at personal distance may communicate verbally (by means of both language and paralanguage) or their communication can take a non-verbal, non-vocal form (and be manifested by means of gestures).

More insight into the problem of theatrical communication is provided by the Russian linguists, Revzina and Revzin. They analyze the plays of Ionesco and approach the violation of normal communication as a dramatic device. In the course of their analysis they single out several postulates that guarantee the normal process of communication:

> 1. The postulate of the semantic connectedness of the text must be organized so that between two statements which immediately follow each other, and within statements and phrases, one should be able to establish a connection of content.
>
> 2. The postulate of determinism: reality is organized in such a way that for some phenomena there are causes, i.e., not all events are equally probable (in the case of 'strong' determinism, for any phenomenon a cause may be established).
>
> 3. The postulate of a common memory: the sender and the receiver when using the same model of

the world have to some extent a common memory, some shared amount of information about the past.

4. The postulate of a common prognosis for the future. The sender and the receiver, using the same model of the world (i.e. appraising the world in the same categories), predict the future more or less identically.

5. The postulate of informativeness: the sender must relate some new information to the receiver.

6. The postulate of identity: the sender and the receiver have in mind the same reality, that is, the identity of a subject does not change while we talk about it.

7. The postulate of truthfulness: between the text and reality there must be a correspondence, i.e. the text must contain a truthful statement about reality.

8. The postulate of the incompleteness of description: a text must describe the reality with some degree of reduction, being based on the existence of a common memory and the ability to predict the future in more or less similar fashion.[42]

The violation of any of these postulates leads to the creation of the absurd. I would like to suggest that the categories distinguished by the Revzins may be reduced to a lesser number which would facilitate our semiotic exegesis. Thus, the postulates of common memory, prognosis, identity and incomplete description are being replaced by the postulate of common knowledge. Consequently, the categories left from the Revzin's taxonomy are the following: common knowledge, informativeness, truthfulness and causality which relate to the external phenomena referred to in the text (thus blending the postulates of determinism and semantic connectedness).

The most useful approach to investigate the pragmatic aspect of theatrical verbal communication is provided by Grice's theory of implicature.[43] Grice claims that there are certain rules governing the conduct of conversation which enable an efficient use of language. They are termed "co-operative principles" and can be described by means of the following maxims: the maxim of relevance simply implies that any contribution made in the conversation has to be relevant. The maxim of cooperation involves the maxim of quality which requires a contribution that is true (in other words, one should not say what is false or say something unsupported by evidence); the maxim of quantity which relates to the level of informativeness (the contribution should not be over-informative) and the maxim of manner which bids one to be clear, brief and orderly. Grice argues that whenever a maxim is violated it leads to "implicatures" (or the technique by which we make sense of what we hear in conversation). Thus, for example, if one person says, "I need some milk" and the other replies, "How do you like my glasses?" one may notice that both the maxims of relevance and quantity are totally violated. In order to assure a normal communication act the maxims of relevance and cooperation have to be observed. In a traditional play the characters' statements, though not always truthful, generally obey the maxims of relevance and cooperation. The utterances are semantically and logically connected which creates continuity in the structure of the play. In the Theater of the Absurd the statements become incongruous and create disjunction instead.

I will examine the utterances of the characters in selected plays in the light of the principles of causality, common knowledge, informativeness, truthfulness and manner at the level of vocal-verbal communication and, then, I will consider how other elements of the Basic Triple Structure of human communication, i.e. paralanguage and kinesics, contribute to the theatrical communication, bearing in mind that paralanguage and kinesics can amplify, contradict or substitute vocal-verbal communication. It seems possible to establish a parallel between Gricean maxims and the Revzins' postulates regarding the conduct of conversation. The Gricean maxim of relevance echoes the postulates of determinism, common memory, common prognosis for future, incomplete description, identity and semantic connectedness. The maxim of quality directly refers to the postulate of truthfulness while the maxim of quantity parallels the postulate of informativeness. In my analysis I will be referring to the principles of causality and common knowledge related to the maxim of relevance as well as to the principles of informativeness, truthfulness and manner.

Finally, the inevitability of communication through behavior is stressed by P. Watzlawick in *Pragmatics of Human Communication*, where he asserts that

> there is no such thing as nonbehavior or, to put it simply: one cannot *not* behave. Now, if it is accepted that all behavior in an interactional situation has message value, i.e. is communication, it follows that no matter how one may try, one cannot *not* communicate. Activity or inactivity, words or silence, all have message value: they influence others and these others, in turn, cannot not respond to these communications and are thus themselves communicating.[44]

While I am not proposing a behavioral model of theater semiotics, I would like to emphasize that nonsense, silence, withdrawal, immobility, or any other form of denial is itself a form of communication. Therefore, even though it has been argued that the Theater of the Absurd is full of nonsense and silence and thus has no message in it, I would argue that it does communicate certain ideas about life and its meaning or meaninglessness precisely by these very means.

Notes

[1] Y., Lotman and B. Uspensky, Tipologia della cultura (Milano: Bompiani, 1973) p. 278.

[2] A. Artaud, The Theatre and its Double (New York: Grove Press, 1958) p. 39.

[3] Y. Ikegami, "A Stratificational Analysis of the Hand Gestures in Indian Classical Dancing," Semiotica, IV (1971) 365-391, p. 370.

[4] M. Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Penguin Books, 1980) p. 407.

[5] U. Eco, "Semiotics of Theatrical Performance," The Drama Review 21:1 (1977) p. 108.

[6] R. Barthes, Elements of Semiology (London: Cape, 1967) p. 262.

[7] We are referring to the following works in particular:

E. Souriau, Les 200 000 situations dramatiques (Paris: Flammarion, 1950).

R. Ingarden, "The Functions of Language in the Theatre," in The Literary Work of Art, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, pp. 377-96.

S. Jansen, "Esquisse d'une théorie de la forme dramatique," in Langages, 12, pp. 71-93.

A. Greimas, Semiotique et sciences sociales, Paris: Seuil, 1976.

[8] An interesting article by Marcus, "Stratégie des personnages dramatiques" is found in Helbo's Sémiologie de la représentation (Bruxelles-Paris: Complex-P.U.F.), 1975.

[9] A. Helbo, Theory of Performing Arts (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1987) p. 110.

[10] The ideas of the Italian semioticians are found in A. Sierpieri, "Ipotesi teorica di segmentazione del testo teatrale," Strumenti critici 32/33, pp. 90-135 and P. Pugliatti, I segni latenti: Scritura come virtualita scenica in King Lear (Mesina-Firenze: D'Anna, 1976).

[11] K. Elam, The semiotics of Theatre and Drama (London: Methuen, 1980) p. 209.

[12] T. Kowzan, Littérature et spectacle (Warszawa: PWN, 1975) p. 212.

[13] M. Issacharoff, "How Playscripts Refer." In A. Whiteside and M. Issacharoff, On Referring in Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) p. 87.

[14] Ibid., p. 92.

[15] W. Krysinski, "Poland of Nowhere, The Breasts of Tiresias, and Other Incongruities, or Referential Manipulation in Modern Drama." In Whiteside (1987), p. 139.

[16] Ibid., p. 149.

[17] Ibid., p. 150.

[18] S. Żółkiewski, Kultura, socjologia, semiotyka literacka (Warszawa: PLW, 1979) pp. 572-626.

[19] J. Veltruský, "The Prague School Theory of Theatre," Poetics Today, vol. 2:3 (1981), p. 228.

[20] J. Honzl, "Dynamics of Sign in the Theatre," (1940) reprinted in L. Matejka, ed. Sign, Sound and Meaning (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1976) p. 90.

[21] K. Elam, The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama (London: Methuen, 1980) p. 8.

[22] P. Pavis, Problèmes de sémiologies théâtrale (Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université du Quebec, 1976) p. 14.

[23] Ibid., p. 17.

[24] T. Kowzan, Littérature et spectacle (Warszawa: PWN, 1975) p. 182. All subsequent citations come from this source and are given in the text parenthetically. The article referred to is reprinted in the book.

[25] A. Helbo, Les mots et les gestes (Lille: Presses Universitoires de Lille, 1983) p. 51.

[26] A. Ubersfeld, L'école du spectateur (Paris: Les Editions sociales, 1981) p. 129.

[27] K. Elam, The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama (London: Methuen, 1980) p. 136.

[28] P. Pavis, Languages of the Stage (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1982) pp. 33-34.

[29] K. Elam, The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama (London: Methuen, 1980) pp. 57-62.

[30] A. Ubersfeld, Lire le théâtre (Paris: Les Editions sociales, 1977) p. 40.

[31] Ibid., p. 40.

[32] E. Fischer-Lichte, "Theatrical Communication," Degrés, 1982 p. f2. All subsequent citations come from this source and are given in the text parenthetically.

[33] M. Issacharoff, "Space and Reference in Drama," Poetics Today Vol. 2:3 (1981), p. 212. All subsequent citations come from this source and are given in the text parenthetically.

[34] G. Mounin, Introduction à la sémiologie (Paris: Les editions de minuit, 1970) p. 88. All subsequent citations come from this source and are given in the text parenthetically.

[35] A. Helbo, "The Semiology of Theatre or: Communication Swamped," Poetics Today, Vol. 2:3 (1981), 105-111. p. 106. All subsequent citations come from this source and are given in the text parenthetically.

[36] E. Fischer-Lichte, "Theatrical Communication," Degrés 29 (1982), pp. f-f9. All subsequent citations come from this source and are given in the text parenthetically.

[37] A. Ubersfeld, Lire le théâtre (Paris: Les Editions sociales, 1977) p. 252.

[38] C. Segre, "A Contribution to the Semiotics of Theatre," Poetics Today Vol. 1:3 (1980), 39-48, p. 41.

[39] F. Poyatos, New Perspectives in Nonverbal Communication (Oxford: Pergamon, 1983) p. 316. All subsequent citations come from this source and are given in the text parenthetically.

[40] E. Hall, The Silent Language (New York: Doubleday, 1959) p. 55.

[41] F. Poyatos, New Perspectives in Nonverbal Communication (Oxford: Pergamon, 1983) p. 210. All subsequent citations come from this source and are given in the text parenthetically.

[42] O. G. Revzina and I. I. Revzin, "A Semiotic Experiment on Stage: The Isolation of the Postulate of Normal Communications As a Dramatic Device," Semiotica, 14 (1975) 245-268, p. 256.

[43] Grice's theory of implicature is published in Semantics and Speech Acts 3 by P. Cole, New York: Taplinger, 1976.

[44] P. Watzlawick, Pragmatics of Human Communication (New York: Norton, 1967) p. 49.

III. Signs of Crisis

1. Signs in the Theater of the Absurd

I argued previously that the Theater of the Absurd and the philosophy of existentialism converge in a series of common themes: the individual and systems, the problem of intentionality, and the significance of choice. I went on to argue that these themes manifest themselves in an innovative dramaturgy which transcends the traditional dominance of the word, diminishing the significance of the expressivity of the actor, but giving greater referential power to other--notably iconic--elements of the stage. And I suggested a methodology for dramatic analysis particularly appropriate to a theater whose impact derives from the clash between a multiplicity of (verbal/visual) signs and codes. The attention of the present chapter focuses on a more specific analysis of signs in a series of selected absurdist plays; this close formal analysis will eventually lead to the wide thematic concerns of the Theater of the Absurd with the predicament of modern man in a world apparently abandoned by hope and reason.

The Theater of the Absurd, unlike ancient Greek tragedy or the medieval mystery play, expresses the absence of a cosmic system of values. It is my thesis that absence can be most effectively communicated by means of visual signs which gain more and more significance on stage. The dramatists of the Absurd maintain an interesting balance between signs denoted by the actor and the ones emitted by the space and sound around him. While in the traditional theater the action concentrated on the actor and he was the main source emitting other signs, in the Theater of the Absurd the actor becomes immobilized and inanimate objects are raised to the level of active sign emitters. The present analysis of signs concentrates on five larger categories based on Kowzan's taxonomy: spoken text, expression of the body, actor's external appearance, appearance of the stage and inarticulate sounds in the plays by E. Ionesco; a Guatemalan dramatist, C. Solórzano, and a Polish playwright, S. Mrożek.

In Ionesco's Le nouveau locataire (1953) "le réalisme prévaudra," but the realism stretched to absurdist proportions.[1] The play opens with "des bruits de voix, de marteaux, des bribes de refrains, des cris d'enfants, des pas dans les escalier, un orgue de barbarie, etc." (p. 175). Thus the first signs to appear are "inarticulate sounds," after which there follows a singing part by "Madame la concièrge." The main character, "le Monsieur," appears and is "l'âge moyen, petite moustache noire, tout de sombre vetu: chapeau melon sur la tête, veston et pantalon noires, gants, souliers vernis, pardessus sur le bras et une petite valise de cuir noir" (p. 175). The set of signs describing the actors' external appearance indicates that "le Monsieur" is a typical "petit bourgeois."

So far there have been two sets of signs evoked, but at the moment when the man addresses the caretaker two more come into being. First, "la concierge se retoure et mettant la main sur son coeur, elle crie" (p. 175), in this way she evokes signs pertaining to "expression of the body," namely, "gesture" and "movement." Both signs indicate her mood surprise which is amplified by the appearance of "word accompanied by "sound effects" (hiccup). From the moment of the first dialog exchange, "word" establishes itself as prevalent. The gentleman retains his dignified posture and keeps on making very short remarks barely moving at all while the caretaker nags him all the time with her gossip and unwanted stories that do not interest him at all. She speaks with a peculiar accent which facilitates the establishment of her social position. So far only three groups of signs have been evoked: "spoken text," "expression of the body," and "inarticulate sounds." When "le Monsieur" starts inspecting the room he activates another system, "appearance of the stage." The information regarding the decor states that the action takes place in "une pièce nue, sans aucun meuble. Une fenêtre ouverte, au milieu, sur mur du fond. Portes à deux battants, à droite et à gauche. Murs clairs" (p. 175). The decor enlivens when "déménageurs" arrive with the gentleman's furniture. They come at the moment when the gentleman is dismissing the caretaker who "en colère, crie" (p. 183), but is not eager to leave. The elements of "spoken text," that is "word" and "tone" describe the caretaker's mood of agitation and unrest which stands in a sharp contrast with the gentleman's "calme." At the same time when "le Monsieur fait la grimace" and "il indique un côté" for the first pieces of furniture he evokes the system of "gesture," "mime" and "movement." The signs emitted by the gentleman pertain mostly to the system of "expression of the body" while the ones evoked by the caretaker are rooted in "spoken text." The signs associated with "appearance of the stage" appear on stage with the arrival of furniture movers who are only described by means of "expression of the body," mainly "movement" and "spoken text." No signs refer to "actor's external appearance" in regards to the furniture movers. They seem to constitute one moving "mass" with the furniture almost as if they were inanimate objects being moved by a tide.

Their movements in ebb and flow manner become gradually more and more dangerous for the gentleman's predicament. With each ebb the gentleman's world narrows considerably as each flow brings more and more objects into the room. In this way, the system of signs regarding "appearance of the stage" is being amplified while the sign systems pertaining to actors become marginal. There is no action or climax in the traditional sense of the word. The whole action consists of monotonous acts of bringing the furniture while the gentleman's action is limited to tracing two chalk circles on the floor serving as a reserved area for him. As the objects accumulate the furniture movers use ladders to hang the pictures and pile other objects on top of the ones on the floor. The first radical step towards the total isolation of the gentleman occurs when the window is concealed by a big sideboard shutting out all the light. The electric light is turned on. In semiotic terms the system of "lighting" is evoked, but it does not spotlight any of the actors or any of the objects as it happens in traditional theater. Its usual function is then denied; on the contrary, the light covers the piles of furniture and amplifies the total effect of overabundant "decor."

The gentleman is confined to an ever-diminishing space in the centre of the stage, "tout ceci est devenu une sorte de ballet pesant, les mouvements toujours très lents" (p. 197). The action borders on pantomime being interrupted by the gentleman's "là, là, là . . ." accompanied by pointing gestures. For some time it assumes the form of a pure pantomime show in complete silence. "Spoken text" and "inarticulate sounds" disappear and the action consists of "expression of the body," mainly "gesture" and the ever multiplying decor. The gentleman "est assis, immobile, chapeau sur la tête, face au public" while the furniture movers "se grattent la tête sous leur casquette, l'air embarrassé; haussement simultanes d'épaules, des bras, qu'ils posent ensuite sur les hanches" as they try to bring in two wardrobes that are too big to go through the door (p. 189). At that moment "spoken text" breaks the silence as the furniture movers enquire what they should do with the rest of the furniture. It turns out that the furniture blocks the staircase, the streets, the subway, even "La Seine ne coulle plus. Bloquée aussi. Plus d'eau" (p. 201). The image is brought to absurd proportions when the second furniture mover remarks, "Vous en avez des meubles! Vous encombrez tout le pays" (p. 201). Eventually, they manage to put some more in through the open ceiling. The gentleman is completely immobilized in the centre of the heaps of furniture. The second furniture mover summarizes the gentleman's condition in the following, "Alors, vous serez bien à l'abri còmme cela. Vous n'aurez pas froid" (p. 202). Their last question is "Vous n'avez besoin de rien?" to which the gentleman replies, "Eteignez" and in the utter darkness sounds his last "Merci" P. 203).

The play begins with the least frequent system of "inarticulate sounds." The first part of the play is dominated by "spoken text" in which the self-serving chatter of the caretaker clashes with the gentleman's reserved tone. The system of "actor's external appearance" is reduced to a minimum level and relates only to the character of the gentleman. The gentleman appears to be endowed with the typical attributes of "le bourgeois" and represents his class in the confrontation with the indignities of life. The remaining three dramatis personae seem enigmatic in terms of "make-up," "hairstyle" and "spoken text," while "les déménageurs" are described by "expression of the body"; particularly, the system of "movement" and "gesture." The gentleman faces two stages in his pursuit of dignity: the first is the oral confrontation with the caretaker. She abuses him with a stream of words which do not establish a process of communication and do not form a typical dialog forwarding the action. The gentleman, however, remains immune to those indignities and dismisses her in the same calm tone of voice. The next phase begins with the arrival of the furniture movers who activate "appearance of the stage." The action assumes the movement of a tide simulated by the gentleman's orders. The inanimate "decor" and "accessory" acquire almost animate qualities as they slowly bury the gentleman inside of the room. The system of "lighting" is switched on to amplify the effect. While "appearance of the stage" dominates the play the remaining systems of "inarticulate sounds," "actor's external appearance" and "spoken text" oscillate towards a marginal position. The gentleman is finally completely immobilized. To emphasize his condition the play ends with a mixture of pantomime and silence.

The gentleman manages to retain his dignity beneath the piles of furniture symbolizing all his material possessions.

Throughout the play the gentleman is being tested by the same means which normally enable the quest for dignity: oral expression and material acquisition. He emerges victorious in the sense that he adjusts himself to the absurdities of life and accepts his predicament.

While in the play by E. Ionesco "appearance of the stage" seems to dominate, in the play by Carlos Solorzano, the significance of this system is diminished and the systems pertaining to the actor prevail. As in Le nouveau locataire, there are only four actors in El cruce de vías (Crossroads) (1958). The system of "actor's external appearance" is least informative. All that is known about the main character, the Man, is that he "joven, cara serena, aproximadamente veinticinco años"[2] Other characters are referred to as the flagman and the woman: Interestingly enough, there appears a character of the Train "formado por tres hombres vestidos de gris" (p. 23) which provides an excellent example of the substitution of one sign system by the signs of the other; in that case the actors "play" the role of "decor." The system of "appearance of the stage" consists of "decor," "lighting" and "accessory." "Decor" is simplified, "Escenario vacio, negro. En un extremo un semáforo que se anima alternativamente con luz verde o roja. En el centro, colgado del techo, un gran reloj cuyas agujas marcan las 5 en punto." (p. 23). It is a small railway station situated in a "nowhere land." The only accessories are the semaphore and the clock.

The semaphore is the source of two colors of light: green and red and as such evokes the connotation of a traffic light in the city. The only other source of light is the lantern the Flagman is holding in his hand. The semaphore and the Flagman light up two ends of the stage. The signs belonging to "appearance of the stage" are evoked simultaneously with the system of "spoken text" and "expression of the body" both pertaining to the category of the actor.

The action begins with the arrival of "the Train." It introduces another color onto the stage as the men forming it are dressed in gray. Only two systems of "expression of the body": "gesture" and "movement" characterize the actors as "hacen mecántcamente una pantomima con un brazo extendido y la mano sobre el hombro de que lo precede, mientras con el otro brazo hacen todos, acompasadamente, un movimiento rotativo, siguiendo el ritmo de las palabras del guardavia" (p. 23). The other systems pertaining to the actor, "spoken text" and "actor's external appearance" are, in that case, completely inactive. The main dramatis persona, the Man, entering the stage as an element of the system of "decor" transgresses the borderline between the two domains of systems (on relating to "the actor" and the other "outside of the actor") and transforms into the actor. As such he is mainly described by the system of "spoken text" and "accessory" (his valise). "Spoken text" is also the principal system used to define the Flagman and the Woman. The dialogue between the

Man and the Flagman fails to establish a normal communication process:

> HOMBRE
> Á esta hora se detiene aquí un tren, ¿verdad?
> GUARDAVÍA, sin verlo:
> Los trenes no se detienen aquí nunca.
> HOMBRE
> ¿Es usted el guardavía?
> GUARDAVÍA
> Me dan muchos nombres.
> HOMBRE
> Entonces, quizás ha visto usted por aquí a una mujer.
> GUARDAVÍA
> No he visto a nadie.
> HOMBRE, acercándose:
> ¿Sabe? La mujer que busco es . . .
> GUARDAVÍA, interrumpe:
> Todas se parecen.
> HOMBRE
> ¡Oh, no! Ella es diferente.
> (p. 24)

The Flagman seems to contradict every single statement made by the man. when the Man inquires about the Flagman's identity the Flagman admits that people frequently regard him as a different person. The fluidity of his personality is reminiscent of the other characters of absurdist plays and points to a general trend towards instability of personality due to the loss of other certainties about life. The Man, who is speaking to the Flagman, has come to look for the woman he got acquainted with through an advertisement in a magazine. He has never met her in person and expects her to be young and beautiful. The Man asks the Flagman if he has seen the woman, but the Flagman avoids the answer by making general statements, e.g. "Todas se parecen," "Todo el mundo vende algo," which leads the man to say, "Decididamente no me comprende usted" (p. 26). Language repeatedly fails the characters as a means of communication. "Spoken text" appears different in the case of the Flagman and of the Man. While the Flagman's idiom of speech is monotonous and the tone does not reflect any emotions, the Man's "word" is accompanied by various shadows of emotions e.g. the Man is surprised, impatient, upset, disillusioned, furious, hesitating, etc. On the background of "spoken text" there suddenly appears "sound effects" of the Train and "lighting" of the green semaphore light. "Appearance of the stage" comes to life with the Train which crosses the stage accompanied by the Flagman's refrain, "Los trenes del Sur corren hacia el Norte" (p. 27).

The following dialogue is reminiscent of the one Vladimir and Estragon engage in En attendant Godot. The motif of awaiting dominates the play and the Flagman's words, "Nunca viene" remind one of the mysterious Godot who has never come to see Vladimir and Estragon (p. 27). Just as in En attendant Godot many discern theological implications, in El cruce de vías the Flagman's remark, "Van y vienen pero terminan por encontrarse . . ." is burdened by theological overtones (p. 28). The Man, however, seems to realize that there is nothing (no heaven) beyond all modes of earthly existence. Finally, the confrontation between the Man and the Woman takes place. The Woman entering the stage evokes the system of "costume" and "movement," "Una Mujer vestida de negro, es alta, delgada.

Lleva la cara cubierta con un espeso velo. Camina sigilosamente con movimiento de pantomima. Lleva sobre el pecho una flor blanca muy grande" (p. 29). The white flower means she is the Woman the Man has been waiting for, but then "Al verse descubierta, la Mujer arranca violentamente la flor blanca del pecho, la guarda dentro del bolso de mano y se vuelve de espaldas, para quedar inmóvil" (p. 29). In other words, the Woman refuses to accept the reality of their meeting. Even though the man insists that she permit him to look at her, she decides not to. The Man, however, can sense a strange familiarity about the Woman. When she refuses to show him her face, the Man follows her and bursts out, "Discuple, soy torpe, lo sé. Por un momento pensé que usted podría ser ella. Pero es absurdo" (p. 31). This remark touches upon the quintessence of the meaning of the play. It refers to a deep metaphysical anguish that the Man suffers when he realizes the transitoriness of his existence and his futile struggle with time.

When the Woman uncovers her face, "Al dejar su cara al descubierto se ve que es vieja. Tiene la frente surcada por profundas arrugas. Es como 'la máscara de la vejez triste'. Esta cara contrasta evidentemente con el cuerpo, aún esbelto, sin edad (p. 31). Nevertheless, she eventually decides to tell the Man her story and she concludes by asking, "¿No ha sentido usted nunca miedo? . . . De vivir, de ser . . . como si toda la vida hubiera estado esperando algo que no llega nunca. Un sufrimiento . . . en la soledad . . . ." (p. 33-34). The climax occurs when the Woman uncovers her withered face, says that "El tiempo es el peor enemigo de ella." and asks the man if he will fight it (p. 35). When the Man says "Sí" and opens his eyes, it is not only "spoken text," but also "expression of the body" that enhance his amazement, "se pone de pie con un movimiento brusco" and asks to be excused for "una estupidez" of his (p. 35). The man fails to recognize the Woman. The tragedy of self-imposed blindness reminds of the tragedy of King Lear who also refuses to see the true nature of things. Both are punished with the loss of those who love them. Cordelia dies and the Woman gets on the train which "sale el tren que arrastra a la Mujer, quien sale con movimientos de pantomima contorsionados y angustiosos" (p. 37). The only difference between the Man and the King is that the Man does not go through the experience of sudden illumination.

El cruce de vías ends in the same way as it begins. The Flagman repeats his refrain in a distant voice, the green semaphore light flashes and the Train passes slowly by. The action has come full circle. The mechanical movements of the characters emphasize puppet-like characteristics typical of the dramatis personae of the Theater of the Absurd. They neither develop in the course of the action nor achieve a better understanding of their condition. The action assumes the qualities of a pantomime show. The play concentrates on a disharmony between the Man's insatiable yearning for an ideal and the indifference of the surrounding world. This incongruity reveals a sense of the absurdity of the human condition.

The sense of absurdity does not only result from the conflicts within man, but it also springs from the confrontation of Man with his surroundings in terms of the social institutions which influence his life. The dramatists of the Absurd attack the social stereotypes to which most members of society conform. The socio-political trend in the Theater of the Absurd is represented by Slawomir Mrożek, an acclaimed contemporary Polish dramatist, who follows the experimental route initiated by Witkacy. Witkacy in his unique ingenuity touched on a gamut of absurdities of human life. Mrożek, on the other hand, tends to present the absurdity of political and social life. The Polish theater has always been permeated by political issues. It can be explicated by Poland's long subjection to foreign powers which deprived the citizens of the fundamental freedom of expression. Therefore, the theater has become one of the successful means of the expression of political ideas. In Mrożek's plays, the characters question the basic inconsistencies of their existence. They struggle for solutions, but emerge as victims at the end of the battle. In The Martyrdom of Peotr O'Hey (Męczeństwo Piotra O'Heya) (1959), for example, Mrożek shatters the stereotype of a hero ruling a society. Piotr O'Hey is annihilated by modern bureaucracy of the socialist state. His death results from the absurd assumption that there is a tiger in his bathroom which instigates a whole chain of events leading to O'Hey's death. Throughout the development of plot, O'Hey remains totally helpless while the absurdity of the whole situation is never questioned. The absurd attracts the final tragedy.

In the traditional drama the character dominated the scene. In the Theater of the Absurd, on the other hand, the character seems to be subordinated to the situation. The relationship between the character and the situation can serve as an interesting point of departure for a further discussion. Mrożek's *dramatis personae* are often forced to confront a situation which offers no logical solution. Absurd assumptions lead to absurd conclusions, e.g. in *The Police* (*Policja*) (1958), the police force has eliminated all crime and now they have to break the law to avoid being redundant in the country. Mrożek delights in the paradoxes of logic.

He picks up a magnifying glass and takes a closer look at the concept of man's freedom in *Striptease* (1961). The characters in *Striptease*, as the characters in Beckett's *Actes sans parole*, are thrown into a situation (obvious allusions to the Sartre's man "thrown into a situation" or the Heideggerian man "thrown into being") which makes them confront the basic absurdity of their so-called freedom. The beginning of the play reverses the traditional pattern of presenting characters in a decorated surrounding. The opening scene is dominated by the signs pertaining to the "appearance of the stage" and "inarticulate sounds." When the curtain rises there is no one on stage. The first signs to be evoked are the ones pertaining to "accessory," "The stage is bare except for two chairs. Two doors, one stage left and one stage right, should be in clear view of the audience."[3] There are no references to the systems of "lighting" or "decor" (excluding the chairs and doors). "Strange rattling and rumbling noises" follow and are "vaguely familiar but cannot be identified" which evokes the system of "inarticulate sounds" and signs pertaining to "sound effects." The two principal characters of the play, Mr. I and Mr. II--one being the exact replica of the other--enter the stage. Mr. I is "middle-aged, neatly but conventionally dressed, and carries a briefcase." With his entrance two groups of signs are evoked: the "expression of the body" and "actor's external appearance." In terms of the "expression of the body" the signs pertaining to "movement" dominate the scenario, "Mr. I comes rushing in" and "looks around" (p. 5) There are no references to "mime" at all. The signs related to the "actor's external appearance" convey the minimum information about "costume" only. The conventional suit and the briefcase, however, give rise to the connotations about the characters' social standing and, undoubtedly, labels them as typical representations of the middle class. The most important indication relating to the type of situation is that "He should convey the impression that he has not entered the stage of his own will" (p. 5). He is "thrown" into a situation by external circumstances and is forced to confront the dilemmas of existential condition. A few moments later, Mr. II joins Mr. I in the same manner and the auditory signs pertaining to Actor come into play. Mr. I and II ponder the cause of the situation they have found themselves in and are unable to explain it in a rational way. Mr. I accepts it in total passivity, "I've decided to stay put. The situation will clear up by itself" (p. 8), while Mr. II insists that they take an action. The auditory signs of "word" prevail and no references to tone appear. The men establish the facts, "Basically, everything was perfectly clear, well-shaved, carrying our practical and indispensible briefcases, we set out purposefully towards our goal" (p. 10). Thus the "everydayness" of the initial situation is established, but on this perfectly ordinary pattern something bizarre and inexplicable superimposes itself. Mr. II admits they are "unable to define the exact nature of the occurrence," but Mr. I however invents the following definition, "I think all this may be best defined as a phenomenon hovering on the borderline of dimensions and definitions, a connecting link between color, form, smell, weight, length, and breadth, shade, light, dark, and so on and so forth" (p. 11). The definition is completely ignored by Mr. II. It verges on the absurd as it is all embracing, and conveying nothing at the same time. Having been forced to confront the situation, Mr. I concludes that their main task now is to preserve calm and personal dignity and he believes that their freedom is unlimited. Then comes the climax of the play: Mr. I defines freedom as the capacity of making a choice and he explains, "As long as I am sitting here, knowing that I can walk out of this door, I am free. But as soon as I get up and walk out, I have already made my choice. I have limited the possible courses of action. I have lost my freedom" (p. 13). When Mr. II is ready to leave to exercise his freedom the "strange noise is heard" thus evoking the signs of "sound effects" belonging to the Non-Actor category. The doors close slowly thus evoking the group of signs belonging to the "decor." Mr. I maintains his belief in personal freedom while Mr. II "takes off one shoe and bangs with it against the wall" thus calling the sings of "gesture" and "movement" into being. As a result of his action "one of the doors opens slowly, and in comes a Hand of supernatural size. It resembles the old-fashioned printer's symbol: Hand with pointing index finger and attached cuff. The palm should be brightly colored to make it stand out clearly against the scenery. With bent index finger the hand makes a monstrously repeated gesture in the direction of Mr. II beckoning to him" (p. 15). The appearance of the Hand enlivens the signs pertaining to the "accessory." It is interesting to note that there is no sub-categorization in this group so the Hand can be categorized as a visual sign in the Non-Actor category related to the "appearance of the stage," but there is no distinction between static and dynamic signs. If there were such a differentiation then the Hand would be a "dynamic accessory" and a new element in any taxonomy.

The hand inaugurates the "striptease." Mr. I and II slowly give the Hand their shoes, belts, jackets and trousers. Finally, the Hand links them together with a pair of handcuffs. During their "striptease" both men reveal their egotism, conformity, and the lack of civil courage. The Hand representing a superpower or a mysterious authority subordinates the men to the situation. This is an illustration of a clear predominance of visual over auditory signs. When Mr. II realizes that the Hand has deprived them of their freedom of movement in space and its next step might well be to limit their duration in time, they decide to apologize to the Hand. Mr. II addresses the Hand in the following manner:

> Mr. II: Dear Hand! I mean, Dear and Most Honorable Hand! Although well aware of the fact that the Hand is not here to listen to us, we still beg permission to speak to the Hand from the heart . . . We sincerely beg to apologize for . . . for . . . (whispering to Mr. II) For what?
>
> Mr. I: For walking, for going ahead, for everything in general . . . (p. 24)

In their utmost servility they kiss the Hand and subject themselves to the grotesque power. Instead of a reward, a

Second Hand appears "completely covered by a red glove" (p. 25). The First Hand covers the heads of the men with conical cardboard hoods symbolizing blindness and makes them move toward stage center. The men, "constantly stumbling and swerving," are bound to follow the Second Hand. The last spoken words call for briefcases, the only tokens of the identity they have lost. This scene illustrates an interesting interaction between the signs of the Actor and the Non-Actor categories. The objects rise to the role played by men, or, in other words, men are reduced to the level of objects and visually reified. The signs of the "word" interact with the signs of the "accessory." In the last scene, we witness the visual subordination of man to the situation.

S. Mrożek, who is often said to represent the socio-political trend in the Theater of the Absurd, attacks the social stereotypes to which most members of society conform. The characters of the play, typical representatives of the middle class, are forced to probe the meaning of freedom. Freedom is defined as the capacity of making choices. In reality, however, making choices is completely impossible because of the authoritarian political system which Mrożek ingeniously presents by visual means: the Hand. This Hand is still under domination of the Red Hand which is a clear allusion to the political situation of Poland, even the title of the play is suggestive. Striptease denotes or implies the revelation of the naked, the true. What, then, is the true nature of freedom in Poland? By switching on the semiotic light one can clearly perceive the paradox of the so-called freedom of the Polish people. Just like the characters in the play, they are stripped of their identity by the manipulation of government authority and are subjected to the rule of the system. Freedom, then, becomes a word without meaning, a sign without context, a gesture without power.

Most of S. Mrożek's plays are sharply pointed political allegories. It is not surprising if one takes a look back into the past of Poland where free speech has been suppressed by the foreign powers in the nineteenth century and by the communists after World War II. D. Rudzka rightly points out that

> Le théâtre polonais, dans son ensemble, a toujours contenu des substances politiques, ce qui s'explique par le fait que du temps de l'asservissement de la Pologne par les puissances étrangères, la nation était d'une tribune politique, d'une possibilité de s'exprimer librement.[4]

Polish culture has been dominated by the influence of the political party. Under socialist rule, Polish Party leader Bierut, a Russian puppet, clung to the strict policy of suppressing independent individual artistic activity. Poland had to await its "thaw." In 1956 as a result of political changes brought about by events of October, the state was able to achieve a greater degree of independence from the Soviet Union. Poland returned to its autonomous cultural policy.

Music, painting, sculpture, dance, theater and film flourished. With approximately four hundred new productions a year, the Polish theater had the most varied repertoire in Europe.

Mrożek's most ambitious play is Tango (Tango) (1964) which presents the disintegration of traditional values and the advent of vulgar mass men who take over the civilized world. It deals with a futile struggle of a young rebel to restore the value of Traditions which had been cherished for many decades. Generally,

> Le principal problème soulevé dans les pieces de Mrożek est celui du totalitarianisme, due rapport du borreau à la victime. C'est là certainement l'obsession de toute une génération qui a vécu la guerre puis le stalinisme . . . Mrożek, de même que Brecht, Jarry et Kafka, est un écrivain politique par exellence, car son ouevre exprime une critique acerbe du pouvoir absolu, du despotisme et de l'écrasement de la liberté de l'individu.[5]

Mrożek and Jarry place the action of their plays in Poland and are deeply preoccupied with the abuse of power in the state. Mrożek's dramas abound in political allusions and focus on the tyranny of the ruling class. Ubu may never have left Poland but, through a metamorphosis, has domiciled himself as people's militia in The Police (Policja) (1958). The new monster, like the former bloodthirsty king, exerts similar political pressures only by means slightly more refined methods. The opposition is not beheaded immediately or thrown into pits. They are thrown into nice dungeons, called prisons, where they are doomed to await their fate.

The political reality of a socialist state is particularly prone to critique. The Marxists advocate that the transition of socialist states to communist ideology be reflected in a gradual transfer of state functions to social organizations. "People's courts" and "People's militia" exemplify this trend. The innovation of "people's courts" allows lay judges, assessors, to sit in and express their verdicts both on issues of fact and law. These lay judges have the power to influence, and sometimes to decide, a sentence. "People's militia" are another disguise used for party manoeuvres. The force supports a liberal interpretation of law depending on the political climate. The underlying hypocrisy of the police force is such that it approves of relatively lax enforcement in purely "criminal" matters, while any opponents on political or economic grounds are faced with a very harsh rule of law. There is really no social control over the police force who, particularly recently, have concentrated on the policing of the economy and have grown in force out of proportion to state needs.

M. Łoś comments very accurately on the attitude of the Polish society toward law enforcers in the following passage:

> Since the majority of citizens accepts the necessity of policing, maintaining order and protecting society from dangerous individuals, the agencies charged with these tasks automatically acquire some legitimacy, and yet they are simultaneously dreaded as representatives of the political tyranny.[6]

The most criticized aspect of the police work is "the very situation where the police are de facto subordinated at all levels to the parallel party organizations."[7] Clearly, both the police and the courts are marionettes at the United Workers Party's disposal. The lack of accountability in the power elite allows the party to pull the strings. The pressure the party can exert over the courts frequently justice from the Polish political landscape.

The disappearance of justice and the hypocrisy of the police force are dissected by J. Mrożek in his play, The Police. Although Mrożek did not bud artistically in the climate of Parisian Boheme his play, The Police, embodies a rebellious spirit. The action begins in the Chief of Police's office which exhibits nothing unusual except the two portraits on the wall, "one of the infant King (a baby in an old-fashioned pram or a child dressed in the style of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie), and the other of the Regent (a frightening-looking old man with a moustache)".[8] The allusions to the political situation of pre-1956 Poland becomes immediately clear. The Regent is the replica of Stalin and the helpless baby is Bierut, Stalin's Polish worshipper. The picture of the baby is particularly accurate in the context to reflect the powers of the Polish party leader. Mrożek adds that "all those in any way connected with the police have big moustaches" which clarifies any doubts as to whom the police are loyal (p. 11). The political climate of the play is evoked by means of the visual signs belonging to the "appearance of the stage" category. The first words of the Chief represent a typical declaration which enables one to regain freedom, "and so with feelings of shame and disgust I renounce my crimes, and the only desire I have is to serve our government with all my strength and with deepest veneration and love for the rest of my life" (p. 11). For the first time, to the dismay of the Chief, the prisoner is willing to sign the document and explains his decision in the following way:

> For ten years you examine me, interrogate me, keep me in prison. Every day for ten years you give me that form to sign. When I refuse you threaten me with dreadful punishments and try to talk me round. Finally, I agree to sign so that I can get out of prison and serve the government and you look surprised and ask me why."

The comic effect is created when the Chief becomes sad on hearing that the prisoner is giving up his fight against the government. Naturally, the Chief should be well satisfied at the excellent performance of his duties involving the suppression of the political opposition. His feelings, however, become understandable in light of the next question asked by the prisoner:

> Prisoner: Exactly, Colonel. Is it true that I am the last man still in the prison?
> Chief (hesitantly): Yes . . .
> Prisoner: You see? Some time ago it became obvious to everyone that we have the best political system in the world. My former colleagues confessed their guilt, received their pardon and went home. Now, there is nobody to arrest. I am the last

> remaining revolutionary? In my heart of hearts I am a stamp collector. (p. 12)

If the last suspect decides to convert to the ruling ideology the police has lost its raison d'être. Rudzka delineates the situation in the following passage:

> Ayant liquidé toute opposition possible, l'agent provocateur n'a plus qui provoquer. Le calme règne dans le pays, on n'arrête plus personne, tout le monde est loyal, il n'y a plus personne dont on doive avoir peur, plus personne à accuser ni à emprisonner.[9]

The Chief seems to be urging the prisoner to see the evils of the political system so that the embodiment of opposition could continue his rebellion thus giving the police force a legitimate reason to exist. The absurdity of such a situation is the source of the comic in the play. The Chief "gets up and stands to attention" and "gets up and adopts an official tone of voice" (p. 13). The category of "spoken text" is enriched by the manipulations of the "tone" and the "expression of the body" manifests itself through "gesture" and "movement." "Standing to attention" becomes an empty political gesture because it is completely contradicted by the "spoken text."

The Chief officially accepts "the prisoner's confession, bearing witness to a change of heart which has come about under the corrective influence of imprisonment," yet he attempts to provoke the prisoner:

> Chief: Honestly, talking to you anyone would think you threw a tomato at a general, not a bomb, and that it never entered your head that (stands to attention) our

Regent, the Uncle of our Infant King, is an idiot?
Prisoner: (Leaping to his feet in indignation) Colonel![10]

And in the following exchange the Chief continues:

Chief: You don't think, then, that our Regent is an old pervert?
Prisoner: Him? That pure old man?
Chief: All right, very good . . . As a representative of the high command I congratulate you on your progress. (p.15)

Finally, the colonel asks the prisoner to look at the pictures of the Infant King and adds:

Chief: . . . Small, isn't he?
Prisoner: Like all children.
Chief: You mean he's a shortarse, eh?
Prisoner: You know, Colonel, if it were not for your uniform and high rank, I might begin to think that you were right. (p. 16)

The Chief's behavior is quite typical of a militiaman. The provocation results in arrest and is completely disregarded during trial. This sheds light on the fairness of the Polish judicial system. Mrożek dwells on a curious reversal of roles in the play and enhances the atmosphere of absurdity.

The Prisoner "takes up the initiative, sits down and pulls his chair up nearer the desk. His tone is more confidential: (p. 16). The systems of "gesture" and "movement" focus the attention on the Prisoner, although the confidentiality of "tone" intends to reveal the political realities of the country:

> So here I am--the last political prisoner in the country that is now flourishing and entirely loyal . . . It is only on my account they still keep the police force going. If it wasn't for me they could

> send all the judges and guards home. The prison could be turned into a preparatory school . . . I tell you, Colonel, you have won at last. The police have brought their mission to a close. The last man to oppose the government lays down his arms and his only desire is to join the chorus of citizens singing hosanna to our Infant King and his Uncle the Regent. For the first time in the world's history the ideal of law and order in a state has been achieved. (p. 180)

This is a very significant statement as it alludes to the realization of political aims of a socialized country en route to communism. This is also a paradox because by eliminating crime and political opposition the police committed ideological suicide.

Mrożek pursues the inversion of roles further than that when he introduces an Agent-provocateur as the third dramatis personae. As the usual pattern is that he who provokes also reaps the fruit of his provocation by arresting a suspect, the Sergeant's behavior leads to a pathetic conclusion:

> Sergeant: Sir, as part of my duties as agent-provocateur I was trying to shout anti-government slogans and they beat me up.
> Chief: Who beat you up? No, you don't really mean that they . . . you were beaten up by . . .
> Sergeant: Unfortunately, yes. I was beaten up by the loyal population.
> Chief: (mutters gloomily to himself) I expected as much. (p. 19)

The Sergeant's detailed report confirms the citizens' deepest admiration and respect for the state and its institutions. The citizens were telling him to "leave the police alone" and one of the old women stated with full appreciation that "After a search you always feel more comfortable and loyal, and if you don't have your house searched you get an uneasy feeling" (p. 20). The reaction of the "loyal citizens" in the play is only possible in the world model created by Mrożek. Clearly, in reality, the citizens would never side with the police as it represents the despised political power serving the interests of the Party. Naturally, anybody would rather avoid a search of his house, but in the play's world the "old bag" feels revitalized having had her house searched. This discrepancy between the reality of the situation in Poland and the possible world of the play generates the comic and absurd quality.

At the end of Act I the Chief returns the things found on the Prisoner at the moment of his arrest: "a cape, a mask and a bomb." These three things evoke the system of "accessory" and signify the feared opposition. The bomb refers to the fact that it would only be possible to overthrow the political system by force and the mask indicates the necessity to remain disguised, i.e. underground. On leaving, the Prisoner "kisses the hand of the Chief of Police, then of the Sergeant and of the Policeman" (p. 22). This reverence and servility directed at the despised oppressor create yet another absurd association. The prisoner is overwhelmed by a sudden urge to join the loyal people and hastily signs the declaration of loyalty. He enters the street with a piercing shout "Long live our Infant King and his Uncle the Regent!" (p. 23). On hearing the Chief breaks down murmuring "My God!"

while the Sergeant dreams of a possible provocation of the released. The Chief's hiding "his face in his hands" through the system of "gesture" emphasizes the despair which is completely inappropriate in the context. The picture of the chief shattered by the loyalty of a citizen constitutes yet another grotesque distortion of the political situation of a socialist state. The police force is formed to protect the interests of the state and the subservience of the citizens should not cause any distress to the members of the force but rather be in tune with their primary duties.

In Act II the Chief pays a visit to the house of the Sergeant. The room looks like the office with the same portraits of the Regent and the King on the walls. Mrs. Agent-provocateur is busy adding a military accent to her husband's civilian clothes, i.e. she is sewing some gold braids on her husband's underpants. This innocent action reflects the police's preoccupation with the "military look" which supposedly adds importance and an aura of formality. The particular item of clothing, however, indicates how little respect the police insignia really carries for ordinary citizens. Thus, again, the "accessory" speaks louder than words. The Chief soon learns that the Sergeant is downtown doing some voluntary provoking. The Chief and Mrs. Agent-provocateur express their deep concern for the lack of crime in the country. Again, in any other country in the world, where the police exist for legitimate reasons, the lack of crime would be a source of contentment. Then, the woman tells the Colonel how she and her husband met, "He reported me to the secret police and I reported him" (p. 25). They have children who, following the police station's routine, are kept locked up. This brief mention of family history and routine destroys the traditional romantic love story pattern which forms the foundation of family life. The rigid manner of raising the children, blindly imitating the police routine, emphasizes the excessive adherence of the police force to the code of obedience.

The Sergeant returns from his unsuccessful provocation mission and changes immediately into his uniform. This provides a source of yet another parody of the police's preoccupation with external appearances. The Chief is impressed, "Sergeant, if it hadn't been for you perhaps we'd never have lived to see this alarming drop in crime figures. This is to say, I mean, thanks to you we now have this perfect state of law and order" (p. 25). The Chief orders the Sergeant to be surprised by his visit and the sergeant sincerely reacts: "I'd sooner have expected a revolution" to which the Colonel replies, "No wishful thinking now, Sergeant" (p. 27). The Chief's reply, is, again, only possible in the world model evoked by Mrożek. In reality, the police force in a socialist state is haunted by the spectre of revolution overthrowing the oppressive political system of which the police force is one symptom.

Then the Chief complains about the situation in the country:

> The whole police force is standing on the edge of a precipice, on the eve of a catastrophe. What is the function of the police? It is to arrest those who offend against the existing order . . . We have beautiful prisons constructed at great expense; we have a highly trained, devoted staff; we have courtrooms, offices and card indexes--and now have not one single suspect, not one single clue to follow up. The people have become wildly, cruelly, bestially loyal. (p. 30)

The "bestial" loyalty of the people is obviously never possible in a state that imposes a political system by means of fabricated election results, as such results never allow the true representation of the interests of the people. Finally, the aim of the Chief's visit becomes completely clear: he needs at least one suspect to keep the police force in existence and he has chosen the Agent-provocateur to be his "Sergeant redeemer." They agree what the Sergeant is supposed to shout, open the window and the most pathetic arrest takes place:

> Sergeant: (shouts) Our Regent, the Uncle of our Infant King is a dirty swine!
> Chief: (drawing his sword, loudly) I arrest you in the name of our Infant King and his Uncle the Regent!. (p. 33)

Throughout the Act there are very few references to systems other than the "spoken word." Just before the arranged arrest, however, the Sergeant "Runs away from the window and takes out a brush from behind the screen." Then, "with one careful movement he removes a speck of dust from the uniform which is now hanging again on the tailor's dummy" (p. 33). The sudden movement evokes the signs pertaining to the systems of "movement," "gesture" and "costume." The dummy dressed in the uniform, again visually, through accessory denotes the essence of the police force in the country. Through the pompous arrest topped by the drawing of the sword (yet another accessory), the first step towards the salvation of the police force has just been accomplished. The state is about to regain its powerful apparatus of protection.

In Act III the action moves back to the office of the Chief of Police. The Sergeant is sitting where the prisoner sat in Act I. The Chief is getting ready for the visit of a general who wants to see the "saviour." Indeed, the police have been "granted funds for rebuilding the prison, recruiting new personnel and strengthening the patrols" (p. 34). The conversation between the Chief and the Sergeant slowly becomes a replica of the Chief's dialogue with the Prisoner from Act I. The repetitiveness of verbal and visual patterns enhances the absurdity of the situation. The sergeant notices the shortcomings of the socialist system and reflects on the cultural policy of the state, "Take art and culture, for example. Will you tell me, Colonel, why did we have to torment and persecute those poor artists?" (p. 38). This is a direct allusion to the real cultural policy of the socialist state which consistently suppresses individual creativity by censorship and imprisonment for the expression of contrary political views. The Sergeant has the same view from his cell, but he fails to see the happiness of the people working in the fields; rather, he notices "what sour expressions they've got on their faces, the general dissatisfaction that's painted on them" (p. 38). Finally, the Sergeant admits that the Regent is an idiot and the Infant is a shortarse. The seemingly insignificant recognition of the reality of the political life of the country constitutes the climax of the play. From this moment onwards the metamorphosis of the Sergeant into a revolutionary becomes more and more evident. With the Uncle being an idiot and the Infant King being a shortarse the senseless tyranny is suddenly manifested as painfully real.

Upon the Sergeant's declaration, the General is accompanied by the former Prisoner in the uniform of an Aide-de-camp. The general enters "in suitable regalia, with a moustache, of course" (p. 39). The general's external appearance, particularly, the signs pertaining to the "hair-style" (moustache) communicate visually the political loyalty of the army to the followers of Stalin. The Chief reports to the General the success of their operation: the ringleader has been caught and is being interrogated systematically. The efficiency of the police action is ridiculed in the following passage:

> General: A dangerous bird. Did you find any explosive materials on him?-

Chief: Not so far. But we haven't given up hope. (p. 40)

It turns out that the former revolutionary who threw a bomb at the General has become elevated to the rank of Lieutenant and is regarded as an expert in the matters concerning the fight against subversive activity. The immediate promotion after conversion to the official ideology seems to be a frequent reward. Thus, the Prisoner and the Sergeant have exchanged their roles. The paradox of the situation blooms.

The loyal Lieutenant conducts the investigation in such a way as to lead to the actual rehearsal of an attempt upon the life of the General. The Aide insists that he is carrying out his duty and is suggesting what he considers to be "the most effective means of unearthing anti-government activities" (p. 46). Consequently, he gives the Sergeant his old mask and bomb and provokes the Sergeant into throwing the bomb at the General. This strikes yet another comic chord in the context of Poland's political situation. Guns and bombs are not accessible to the public, so that bomb attacks are never heard of. The bomb attack evokes the whole group of signs: the "sound effects" from the "appearance of the stage." The explosion is the only clear evocation of the signs from the categories of "appearance of the stage" and "inarticulate sounds."

When the sound of explosion calms down, the Aide arrests the Chief on the charge of neglecting his basic duty "to protect generals against bomb attacks." At that moment the General enters and explains that he had hidden in the lavatory. The Chief, in turn, arrests the General "for irresponsibly exposing the uniform of a general to attacks by bombs, and under suspicion of condoning subversive conduct" (p. 50). The absurdity of the situation culminates in the final lines of the play:

> Aide: We still haven't sorted out the question of whether a policeman who has arrested an individual with whom he finds himself in a state of mutual arrest, like the chief is with me, is able to arrest a third individual, by whom he has at some time previously been arrested together with the first individual to whom he is united by the first double action of arrest.
> Chief: Persons under arrest are not permitted to express an opinion.
> Aide: The same to you, Colonel.
> General: It looks, gentlemen, as if the police now have plenty of work on their hands.
> (The sergeant has up to now been standing modestly apart from the others. He now utters a high-pitched cry and raises one arm in the air. The rebel in him has come completely to the fore.)
> Sergeant: LONG LIVE FREEDOM! (p. 51)

The absurd chord is struck one more time through the complete reversal of roles: the play which opens with the Prisoner's declaration of loyalty ends with the Sergeant's high-pitched cry and rebellious gesture for freedom. Throughout the play the system of "word" and "tone" dominate while the "expression of the body" and "actor's external appearance" receive minimum attention. The "appearance of the stage" continues to carry political overtones through the pressure of pictures of political leaders and the attention to uniforms and formalities. The final passage of the play indicates that the only way for the police force to subsist in a socialist country is to continue to arrest suspects from any stratum of political spectrum. The system can thrive as long as the police provides it with the nourishment of political opposition. The Aide's deliberations as to the rights of the citizens under arrest indicate the general lawlessness reigning the country.

The lack of clarity seems to exist not only in the political sphere. The author's note on the production of The Police, preceding the text of the play, points to the ambiguities of the artistic nature as well. The author tells the reader in detail what the play is not: it is not an allusion to anything or a metaphor. It is not a comedy or an "experimental" play. He argues that "the most important thing is to present the naked text, as exactly as possible, with a firmly underlined sense of logic in the opinions and scenes" (p. 7). The logic in the possible world of The Police is an exact inversion of the logic in the real world. It enables the author to construct a model of the world in which he can give free rein to his criticism safely disguised in the disgraced theatricality. Finally, the author emphasizes that

> While I know what this little play is not, I do not know what it is, and it is not my duty to explain what it is. This must be discovered by the theater. And if anyone imagines that these author's remarks and 'nots' limit the producer or leave him without a job to do, it means that the person has no true

> respect for the theater. The theater is not so cramped and poverty-stricken as he thinks. (p. 8)

The last passage alludes to the fact that many pre-1956 plays had been banned by the United Workers Party's censors who had no respect for free art. At the same time, however, Mrożek expresses optimism and faith in the power of the theater to become a political tribute of the nation.

The Police is a scathing satire on the police system in a socialist state. Mrożek delights in the system of logic where through the reversal of roles the prisoner becomes a policeman and a policeman becomes the prisoner. This paradox is the source of absurdity in the play. The functioning of the police is shown to be devoid of reason and as such culminates in a nonsense mutual arrest of the functionaries and the suspects. It seems that anybody, no matter whether a civilian or a militia officer, can be a scapegoat of the system. The harshness of sentences, particularly for the crimes of political nature, reflects the state's phobia of opposition.

The police force's tactic seems to be based on provocation as the most successful method of arrest. The efficiency of the police agency is ridiculed in their catching the "serious opposition," i.e., the stamp collector and the disoriented sergeant. In arresting these two, the police's preoccupation with a spectre of revolution clearly manifests itself. The main function of the police is the arrest of those who offend against existing order, which is understandable in Poland where the Marxist-Leninist model of socialism was imposed against the will of the people. The state has to defend itself. The main duty of the police in the play is described as the "protection of generals against bomb attacks." This creates a comic effect in light of the fact that there is chronic shortage of bombs on the Polish market. Mrożek also pokes fun at the officials' craving for "careerism." Apparently, it is easy to climb the ladder of success in any field as soon as one is converted to the ruling ideology. The quick and impressive promotion of the prisoner to the rank of a specialist in the matters of subversive activities illustrates that point. The servility of the members of the police force (or any other government organ) is rewarded by the "benevolence" of the state in terms of additional funds for the development of the institution. The police emerges as the main force of coercive power and the guardians of state security.

The themes of individual and systems and the significance of choice are distinctly pronounced in the plays of Ionesco, Solórzano and Mrożek. The signs of the "expression of the body" and "actor's external appearance" seem to have been displaced by the "spoken text" and "appearance of the stage." The "word" is often contradicted by "tone" and through constant repetitions neutralizes its meaning. The "appearance of the stage" is most effectively communicated by the "accessory" which acquires a stronger referential power through the scarcity of "decor" and lighting, and conveys the sense of absence of values in the surrounding world. The prevalence of visual signs related to the "appearance of the stage" results in the reduction of the expressivity of the actor (or, the signs of the "expression of the body") and shows the symbolic reification of man. The man in Ionesco's play is completely immobilized, Solórzano's play ends with a "writhing mass of bodies" and in Mrożek's dramas the characters are forced off the stage by the powerful Hand or end in total chaos.

The dramatists articulate social, metaphysical and political concerns of modern man by means of visual signs more effectively than by means of words which tend to lose their meaning through empty repetitions. The repetitions of visual and verbal signs contribute to the creation of the absurd. The other sources of absurdity in the plays are the disruption of logic, the use of inversion of roles and the emphasis on paradox. All plays end in pantomime shows which clearly indicate the prevalence of visual signs over verbal ones. The characters are doomed to passively accept their reification. The instability of personality and inability to explicate phenomena in a rational way explore the theme of the individual and systems and emphasize the impossibility of making choices in a world permeated by the loss of certainties about life and by the collapse of reason.

2. Codes in the Theater of the Absurd

The plays of the Theater of the Absurd are dedicated to expressing the theme of enforced human solitude. The sources of this theme can be traced back to the philosophical and social aspects of human existence: man is presented as being cut off from God and from other men. If isolation were purely a social phenomenon, then social reforms could, at least potentially, alleviate its presence. If, on the other hand, isolation is an inherent experience of the human condition, then philosophy does not seem to offer a solution and one is forced to ask whether human contact is at all possible, or whether man is condemned through the mere fact of his existence to personal solitariness. "Loneliness begins with the recognition of one's singularity," claims T. Parkinson, "the fact that a deep communication of that self and recognition by others of its legitimacy is not fully possible . . ." And he continues to stress that "the sense of being a voice in the void--speaking in a vacuum--is unsettling and disturbing."[11]

The Theater of the Absurd frequently dwells on the unspeakable and presents the characters trapped in the labyrinth of words. It is my thesis that the disjunction in language indicates disjunction from self and from the other. The focus of the present chapter will be the exploration of this phenomenon by means of the semiotic codes (delineated in the previous chapter on theater semiotics) in the plays of S. Beckett and, a Polish contemporary dramatist, T. Różewicz. S. Beckett's Krapp's Last Tape (1958) and T. Różewicz's The Funny Old Man (Śmieszny staruszek) (1963) explore the alienation of two lonely old men while S. Beckett's Happy Days (1961) and T. Różewicz's The Old Woman Broods (Stara kobieta wysiaduje) (1968) present two lonely women who are imprisoned and alienated by words. It is interesting to note that many characters in the Theater of the Absurd are recruited from an old age group. Beckett and Różewicz break a cultural taboo by dealing with old age. Old age and death seem taboos in the culture. The vision of old age is terrifying simply because it is a reminder of the unavoidable to come. In their plays Beckett and Różewicz seem to have trespassed the frontier of common cultural roles which value youth and love, and as such, are hard to reconcile with old age. They present a frightening image of old people who ponder the futility of their lives and realize (or are not able to realize) its meaninglessness. The same image appears in Ionesco's Les chaises when the old man looks back on his life and all he can see is a "big black hole." He seems to achieve understanding in his own act of suicide.

It has been pointed out previously that the plays of the Theater of the Absurd tend to deviate from the traditional dramatic matrix. This is most visible in the deviation from the traditional concept of character. In the plays of Beckett and Różewicz the characters become endowed with strange characteristics which set them apart from the classical concept of character as a human being who in the course of an action goes through various peripeteia and achieves a better understanding of his condition. The characters in the Theater of the Absurd appear dehumanized; they either acquire puppet-like attributes or are reduced to an animal level reminiscent of a larva-state. The dramatists of the Absurd do not provide insight into their characters. The _dramatis personae_ in absurdist plays remind us of the characters of _nouveau roman_ which heighten the tension by ambiguities and indeterminacy. The concept of the character is also influenced by the obliteration of action in the Theater of the Absurd. Firstly, characters are no longer exposed to the tribulations of fate and, consequently, rarely develop at all. Secondly, their inability to act is conveyed by visual means and often leads to the static picture in which characters are immobilized and unable to move. The progressive withdrawal from the self is also manifested in the disappearance of names. The _dramatis personae_ tend to be called by generic names, e.g. the man, woman, or, simply, he or she. This tendency is closely connected with the dissolution of characters' identity.

The main character of _Krapp's Last Tape_ is still endowed with a name although it raises many connotations from a phonetic perspective. Krapp refers to a piece of excrement which in a broader context may be taken as a reference to the human condition limited to the carnal aspect of existence. The word "last" of the title bears associations relating to death which is an expression of pessimism dominating the whole field of the Theater of the Absurd. The word "tape" also carries important significance. It relates to the character's non-creativity and his sole ability to recreate the past; in other words, his present life consists of a heap of memories which keep him alive. The inability to act and to create are two aspects of the lameness of the human condition.

Krapp's Last Tape begins with a short pantomime show; in other words, the kinesic code comes into action. It is a short vaudevillan scene which can be encitled "The Banana Adventure." Krapp is eating a banana and he "treads on skin, nearly falls, recovers himself, stoops and peers at the skin and finally pushes it, still stooping, with his foot over the edge of the stage into the pit."[12] So far not even a single word has been uttered. The codes pertaining to the "appearance of the stage" are not burdened with an excess of information. The architectural codes communicate that the action takes place in a room which is only furnished with "a small table" and "a tape-recorder with a microphone and a number of cardboard boxes containing reels of recorded tapes" (p. 10). The pictorial code has nothing more to add. The proxemic code indicates one part of the stage with a table which is amplified by the system of lighting while the rest of the stage remains in darkness. It should be pointed out that the scarcity of information available through architectural, pictorial and proxemic codes denotes the universality of the place of action and allows the concentration on the essential.

Krapp possesses all the attributes of an old person: "Very near-sighted (but unspectacled). Hard of hearing. Cracked voice. Distinctive intonation. Laborious walk and white face. Purple nose. Disordered grey hair, unshaven" (p. 9). The cosmetic code carries the information regarding Krapp's appearance. "Purple nose" may indicate Krapp's propensity to drink or endow him with clownish attributes. The vestimentary codes enhance the image of Krapp as clown, "Rusty black narrow trousers too short for him. Rusty black sleeveless waistcoat, four capacious pockets . . . Surprising pair of dirty white boots, size ten at best, very narrow and pointed" (p. 9). Thus Krapp emerges as a clown who has just performed his vaudevillan trick.

Most of the play is communicated to the audience by means of the tape to which Krapp also listens. The beginning of the action is concerned with Krapp's searching for the right tape. He finally finds "the farewell to love" tape recorded when he was thirty-nine. Before he sits down and listens he performs another vaudevillan interlude, "he knocks one of the boxes off the table, curses, switches off, sweeps boxes and ledger violently to the ground, winds the tape back to the beginning, switches on, resumes posture" (p. 14). Krapp on the tape starts recounting incidents that occurred a long time ago in his everyday routine. All the information about Krapp's earlier life is, then, communicated by means of an auditory device devoid of physical existence. The state of Krapp's mental deterioration becomes evident when the "young" Krapp refers to his mother's long "viduity" and the old Krapp does not seem to understand the word (p. 18). He switches the tape off and brings out an enormous dictionary to look up the word. The pictorial code (referring to the presence of the dictionary and the significance of that fact) draws the attention to the change that has affected Krapp. The dictionary is used not only to teach us the meaning of the words, but also to let us remember the meaning we have forgotten. Obviously, Krapp at thirty-nine understood the meaning of "viduity," but Krapp at sixty-nine is not able to recall it, his memory has deteriorated. Beckett is also mocking the audience because not too many spectators would be able to understand that word themselves.

Throughout the play Krapp continues his "recherche du temps perdu." He concentrates on the only meaningful experience: the love scene which he replays a few times. After each time, having listened to it, Krapp switches the tape off and broods over the following, "I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us gently, up and down, and from side to side" (p. 23). Those words brought the memories of Krapp's masculine confidence and made him realize his diminishing sexual powers. In a form of protest Krapp changes the tape and starts recording himself, "Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty-years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that. Thank God that's all done with anyway. The eyes she had!" (p. 24). In this pathetic outburst of emotional protest Krapp gives relief to his lust. What follows is a short parody of desire which has never decreased, but emerges in a sharp contrast with his sterile present life. Krapp re-plays himself, talks to himself and laughs with his middle-aged self at his younger self. The whole play follows a pattern of monologue as Krapp is the only character talking and being present on the stage. From his recorded memories the audience learns that Krapp has been lonely for most of his life and unable to establish a meaningful contact with other people. Therefore, Krapp follows an irresistible urge to go on talking as it seems to be the only manner to prove his existence.

The propensity for verbosity is shared by many of Beckett's characters. It amounts to the travesty of Descartes' famous dictum _cogito ergo sum_ (I think therefore I am) into a new concept of _puto ergo sum_ (I talk therefore I am). It is important to realize that _puto ergo sum_ serves as the sole means of identity assertion for the characters in the Theater of the Absurd. Krapp, as other _dramatis personae_, is a static character and the concept of action in the traditional sense of the word seems to have ceased to exist. It is, instead, replaced by the concept of "interiorized action" which the character "performs" by means of words. Consequently, auditory codes seem prevalent although they are substituted occasionally by visual ones. The important feature is their mutual exclusiveness, in other words, when visual codes are operant (e.g. a short vaudevillan act by Krapp) the auditory ones are silent and vice-versa. In this way, the codes complement one another to weave a complex braid of theatrical meaning.

The puto ergo sum formula plays the most important role in Różewicz's The Funny Old Man. The main character is an old man who, unlike Krapp, does not have a name; he is simply one representative of old age. There is a link of similarity between the two characters. Krapp is portrayed as an eternal clown (red nose, "banana peel act") while the principal character of Różewicz's play is referred to as "funny," but he is presented as a victim and may thus stir the audience's compassion. Like a Kafkaesque hero he is accused of something that is never openly stated and the man does not understand the nature of his guilt. His only way to defend himself is to go on talking. The man appears in court. In Beckett's play the significance of visual codes was reduced to a minimum. Różewicz, on the other hand, concentrates on the appearance of the stage. In the group of visual codes both the Actor and the Non-Actor categories are active. Among the Non-Actor category of codes the pictorial one is most informative. In the Actor category only the vestimentary code carries some information about the main actor who is dressed in "a thread bare, but neat suit."[13] The cosmetic code is silent and the kinesic code comes into play at the end of the play when the Old Man leaves the courtroom. The Old Man is not the only one to appear on stage:

> After the interval children play on the stage during the performance. They run about, shout, play hide and seek and hopscotch. The smallest ones are building sandcastles in a sandpit . . . What the children say and sing is of no consequence. The children's games are a performance in its own right which has no connection with the Old Man's case. (p. 111)

The "performance in its own right" is an interesting experiment eo ipso. It is reminiscent of a happening which implies a collage of various activities not leading in the direction of definite goals. What unfolds in front of the spectator's eyes is two parallel actions: one having a form of a formal hearing and the other presenting kindergarten life. One action can be regarded as a distorted reflection of the other leading to the equation of old age with childishness and the inability of the former to deal with the latter. Old age becomes ridiculous on the basis of the confrontation but it also appears pathetic and stirs compassion. The Old Man comes to embody loneliness and disillusionment with the past. In regards to the children no codes seem to supply any information about their sex, age, clothes etc.

In the Actor category, there appears an interesting replacement: dummies "play" the actors. Such experiments are not a novelty in the theater. Artaud, for example, engaged in similar eccentricity in the adaptation of Shelley's The Cenci. Solórzano experimented with the reverse situation: the actors played the part of the decor. In Różewicz's play the first assistant is "a man with a moustache and grey hair. A dummy." The second assistant is "a bald-headed old man. A dummy." And the learned counsel is "in barrister's robes but without a head. A dummy" (p. 110). In the first scene the judge is "a beautiful young woman in judge's robes, beautiful hands and hair. A dummy of natural size" and "after the interval" the dummy-judge is replaced by "a live actress" (p. 110). In stage directions it is suggested that the smallest children who are building sandcastles in a sandpit "could be life-sized dolls" (p. 111). In terms of visual codes, the elements of the Actor category are replaced by the components Non-Actor pictorial codes. The device, possible in the field of the theater, proves the high flexibility of semiotic codes. The category of the Actor oscillates between the animate and inanimate poles of representation. The vestimentary and cosmetic codes carry information regarding the dummies "playing" the court. The pictorial code completes the picture of the stage with "gymnastic equipment" on the right of the stage which, "during the interval," is used by "well-developed live girls . . . Something like a ballet" (p. 111).

The auditory codes focus on the Old Man who is the sole person uttering any words. He is speaking in front of the learned judges relating the story of his life. He starts in medias res, ". . . the elder one used to lie in wait for me and always threatened me each time I passed the corridor" (p. 112). The sentence refers to the little girls who molested and persecuted him terribly usually by "baring their tiny teeth," giving him "severe looks" and "sticking out their prickly little tongues." The Old Man used to bribe them with chocolates to regain his freedom. His life has been a lonely one; in his own words, "throughout my whole life God had protected me from the female sex" (p. 112). The need for companionship is expressed in the following words:

> . . . I found myself longing for the company of some creature. At the same time I read in a newspaper that our planet is inhabited by three billion people. This globe of ours is getting crowded and yet I have no one close to me. (p. 115)

These remarks verging on the absurd (the contrast between "three billion people" and "no one close") are the most bitter reflection of his loneliness. The life around him is also endowed with absurd aspects, e.g. "a container carrying filth and garbage has the inscription "Beauty and Cleanliness a Responsibility of every Citizen' " (p. 118). In his desperate attempts to satiate his desire for a companion the Old Man started collecting dolls, "So I wasn't doing anybody any harm when with my own money I was buying these dolls and playing with them. I would dress and undress these dolls. I also bought one nude doll. A girl" (p. 121). The dolls did not satisfy his longing for somebody, so he burned the nude doll and "nailed the remaining dolls to the table" (p. 122). In this way he expressed his anger and disillusionment with his condition of being lonely.

The Old Man's divagations present a heap of memories, until, close to the end of Scene I, he states "I was terribly frightened when I read in the newspaper that they found the body of an eight-year-old girl that was murdered" (p. 123). At this moment the Old Man appears in a totally different light. For a moment he acquires vicious characteristics of a potential murderer. Immediately after this is stated the audience is confronted with the absurdity of the accusations. The Old Man asks a simple question, "How is it possible that a man who, for half a century, was a spotless citizen and member of society, should be placed before the law on the basis of evidence given by children, that is little girls?" (p. 123). The court, though the innocence of the man is in question, remains silent on this crucial question. On the other hand, it is clearly indicated from the beginning that the court "being played" by dummies will not be able to establish any kind of authority for itself. The significance of the fact that judges are dummies becomes understandable when this fact is related to the question of the administration of justice in general. On the Polish ground it may imply the inability to obtain justice in real life, but more generally, having planted the facts in the field of philosophy, the groundlessness of the accusations refers to the loss of faith in reason which leads through a systematic pursuit of the irrelevant into the domain of the Absurd.

"The victim of little girls' intrigues" proceeds to describe the most important event which occurred after he bought the female mannequin. One day the Old Man noticed that "her stomach was eaten away and something of a dirty, pink color was moving inside . . . It was a nest of domestic mice. They were pink and only just covered in a film of hair" (p. 135). The image of a huge "tummy" is a recurrent motif in Różewicz's plays. In The Funny Old Man the grotesque delivery refers to the longing for love and the impossibility of ever satisfying it. It is a cynical comment on an insatiable desire of the old. The image itself carries connotations regarding fecundity and the eternal process of procreation. The Old Man is trying to give the message to the world and to warn it against growing overcrowdedness. He solves his domestic situation very simply, "I then poured boiling water from the kettle over the lot" (p. 135). However, the human condition is slightly different. In this context the Old Man accuses "those tiny creatures" simply because "they produce heaps of children and afterwards we solitary men have to bear this burden too" (p. 125). He goes even further and makes the following comment:

> Very often you get some anti-social individual taking as much pleasure as possible with another harmful individual, producing as many children as possible and then the children are dumped on the shoulders of society (p. 125).

The warning against overpopulation of our planet appears in other Różewicz's plays as well, but in The Funny Old Man it acquires absurd overtones whenever the context of the situation is considered: a senile individual, incapable of satisfying his sexual urges, talks about fertility. Due to the nature of the title "Funny Old Man" the seriously catastrophic warning is devoid of any significance. The Old Man's life, just like Krapp's, is dominated by the heap of memories reflecting his past of failure. In both plays old age is degraded and ridiculed. Contempt for old age, Beckett's and Różewicz's common concern, is a symptom of the dehumanization of the contemporary world and a reflection of growing hostility towards old people.

The Theater of the Absurd presents a frightening image of old people who have never really lived since living means the creation of values while their life was mainly consumption and pursuit of entertainment. The conventionalization of behavior is one of the symptoms of reification of man who slowly becomes an object among various things he has gathered greedily during his life. As Beckett and Różewicz attempt to embrace humanity, they make two older women the main dramatis personae in their two other plays, Happy Days (1961) and Old Woman Broods (Stara lobieta wysiaduje) (1968).[14] In Beckett's Happy Days[15] the situation again presents a person "thrown into being," as Heidegger would put it, and forced to confront frustrating limitations of the human condition. The central character is Winnie, "about fifty, well preserved, blond for preference, plump, arms and shoulders bare, low bodice, big bosom, pearl necklace." There is nothing unusual about her appearance, but the extraordinariness is that she is buried to above her waist in the centre of a mound. The fact that she is buried in the earth refers to the misery of the human condition, the lameness of man and the disappearance of freedom in favor of the submission to objects.

As the play progresses into the word-oriented realm, instead of the dominance of action, Winnie's role as a human being is narrowed down to her being a witness, which illustrates another aspect of her reification. Happy Days presents a curious reversal of an old scheme: it is things that do not need her anymore. Winnie pretends that she needs them as she tries to impose everyday routine on the chaos of her life. Her doing so becomes reminiscent of an Aristotelian plot consisting of a beginning, a middle, and end. Winnie has to have time to brush her teeth, to rummage among her things, to sing a song, and, more importantly, to talk to Willie. The pattern repeats itself: there is a couple structure to give the impression of a dialog form of a play. Willie, it becomes clear as the play unfolds, is a peripheral character in the "action," but important from Winnie's point of view. The former formula puto ergo sum comes back into play in Happy Days and only Willie is able to acknowledge Winnie's existence. Consequently, Winnie feels a deep compulsion to go on taking for in this way she manages to assert her existence and keep her mind occupied. She realizes the marasme of life and refers to it in "no better, no worse-no change" comment (p. 9).

Winnie's sexual uselessness is commented upon when she demands that Willie show her a pornographic picture. She exclaims, "No but this is just genuine pure filth," and adds that "makes any nice-minded person want to vomit" (p. 19). Then she picks up her magnifying glass to examine the picture more closely, "What does that creature think he's doing? (looks closer) Oh no really!" (p. 19). The pornographic picture carries offensive associations for her as it refers to the unpleasantness of her life and the sterility of her relationship with Willie. The allusion to the sterility of their life is made again when Winnie inquires of Willie about the difference between a hog and a swine and she finds out that a hog is a "castrated male swine . . . Reared for slaughter" (p. 45). She refuses to consider the parallel of this to her own situation and to Willie's and resumes her seemingly cheerful manner of speaking saying, "Oh this is a happy day!" (p. 45). She consciously diverts her mind from the disturbing associations and embarks on her lust for words.

The most important aspect of her existence is her compulsion to talk. Like Vladimir and Estragon, she keeps on talking to avoid the necessity to think and reflect upon the nature of her existence. She is terrified that the day will come when she has nobody to talk to and she doubts the communicative value of the word, "Words fail, there are times when even they fail. Is that not so, Willie? . . . What is one to do then, until they come again?" (p. 24). The remedy seems to be the return to everyday routine: brushing teeth, showering, cleaning nails etc. Winnie constantly repeats the words "happy day" trying to avoid, at least verbally, the reality which is neither "happy" nor a "day." Winnie gradually realizes that meaningless and reality have no relationship:

> And you, she says, what's the idea of you, she says, what are you meant to mean? It is because you're still on your two flat feet, with your old ditty full of tinned muck and changes of underwear, dragging me up and down this fornicating wilderness . . . (p. 43).

It is precisely the fact that Willie is immersed in a conventional daily routine that separates him from the meaninglessness of life. Winnie's awareness is slowly going through the stage when she realizes it is absurd to ask what the absurd is supposed to mean.

The end brings about an important change of mood. Winnie retreats to her illusions about her "happy day," but just them Willie emerges, for the first time, dressed up with top hat and white gloves and he tries to crawl up to reach her, "She turns her eyes, smiling, to Willie, still on his hands and knees looking up at her. Smile off. They look at each other. Long pause" (p. 64). Willie's attire alludes to a solemn occasion, something close to a wedding, or perhaps, death. He might be trying to crawl up to kiss her or to kill her. Whatever he does, does not have a meaningful relationship to Winnie's reality. The incongruity again emerges as an illustration of the absurdity of the human condition.

In terms of semiotic codes, Happy Days is another example of the dominance of the auditory code pertaining to the Actor. The action "happens" by means of words which Winnie constantly utters. The visual codes transmitting the information are most appealing as they most accurately reflect the loneliness and sterility of the couple. In the group of visual modes, vestimentary and kinesic codes carry the scarcity of information while the kinesic code, reduced to Winnie's hand movement and Willie's crawling, seems to carry the associations relating to the act of being buried and reflects their basic inability to act. Winnie's vitality contrasts with the wilderness around which suggests the loneliness of mankind. The visual codes grouped in the Non-Actor category, the pictorial code in particular, paint a terrifying picture of the lameness of the human condition. The auditory codes focus on Actor and except for a music-box tunes to which Winnie hums, there are no other distractions of this sort. Winnie is the dominant character who keeps the "action" unfolding by means of her endless chattering.

Różewicz's play the Old Woman Broods presents a principal character of an old woman who is reminiscent of Winnie through her immobility. The most information is carried by the vestimentary and cosmetic codes:

> She is covered in a heap of spring, summer and winter. With broaches, bracelets, watches, chains, earrings and flowers dangling all over her. Her head is covered with three hats and a variety of multi-colored hair. Her face is still, it is covered with a network of wrinkles but the features are quite clear. A splendid set of white dentures.[16]

The kinesic code is the least informative in relation to the woman: she barely moves at all. She constitutes the centre of the action and all other characters revolve around her. In terms of optical modalities of perception, the play offers a variety of characters. There is a waiter, a doctor, a violinist, a blind man, a young man, a distinguished gentleman, a policeman and "children and puppets entangled in the so-called action" (p. 60). With the increased number of characters the play departs from the traditional scheme of a couple (or one character). The group of visual codes of the Non-Actor category presents "the interior of a huge modern station cafe. Plenty of red, black and white tables and chairs . . . made of metal, glass and colored fibres. They gleam, glisten and sparkle" (p. 61). The acoustic codes are restricted to the Actor group and are full of linguistic and paralinguistic elements. The Non-Actor category of acoustic codes has a peripheral significance.

The action begins with the Old Woman "screeching inarticulately." "A young, suave and clean-looking waiter" enters the stage, moves among the tables and "from his pocket pulls out a long cloth resembling a bandage with which he wipes the tables, his face, nose and hands" (p. 61). Later he uses the same cloth to wipe the glass which the Old Woman complains about saying that "some whore has smudged the edge with her lipstick" (p. 63). The waiter "pulls out his cloth and wipes the glass. He examines it against the light, spits on the glass and wipes it with his sleeve" (p. 63). When the Woman asks him to wipe her face the waiter again, "pulls out his dirty cloth and carefully wipes the woman's face" (p. 64). Having gone through the first wave of sweating the Woman announces to the world that she wants a child. She orders the waiter to "phone up that chap in Bologna and tell him to bring that artificial womb of his without any delay" (p. 66). She celebrates the abdomen, "splendid, colossal thing," and she recites a eulogy on the glory of the "tummy" painting the picture of "the whole humanity" being "a belly, warm pulsating, wrinkled like a jug" (p. 69). The image this created corresponds to the image of the "tummy" in The Old

Man, but in the Old Woman the "belly" becomes an object of worship.

The essential change occurs when the Woman asks the waiter to open the window and "the dust and rubbish float down the tables and floor" (p. 71). From this moment onwards the stage is slowly being invaded by garbage of various sort. The doctor arrives to take care of the "little mother" who has "been barren for the last fifty years" and opens the window; "the mountain of refuse and rubbish pours in" (p. 76). The Woman thanks him for "a breath of fresh air at last" and preaches about all-embracing feelings of love,

> Everything is open to love, you simpleton, you can love hair, skin, bones, there is love of fingernails and love of tongues, love of moles, freckles and birthmarks. You can love in a dog-like, cat-like or bird-like way, you ass! (p. 80)

In such a scenario she urges the waiter to "get the water ready, plenty of water, a whole cauldron of water, prepare the sheets, plenty of sheets . . ." and the grotesque delivery takes place. The curtain falls; it is " a huge white, blood-stained sheet" (p. 81).

In Scene II, the action takes place on "a battlefield. A colossal rubbish dump. A polygon. A necropolis, and yet a beach. A beach by the sea. A green painted beach. The floor is covered with a layer of rubbish, soot and sand" (p. 82). The characters' conversation abut the new world crisis, the weather and the possibility of war unfolds against a background of clanking dustbins and garbage trucks roaring outside. The character's conversation is junk (coming from old newspaper scraps) and as such it parallels the waste products of modern civilization. The words uttered are accompanied by the garbage noises and do not convey much meaning, but rather lead to the equation of the value of the word with the value of a piece of garbage; they are garbage themselves.

The quintessence of the absurd is illustrated by visual codes in the incident with a youth. The youth ate a sweet and threw the paper away. The Guardian of Order accuses the youth that he "deliberately threw the sweet paper on to a route which had previously been swept" (p. 106). The youth replies, "Anyway, I was standing on a heap of rubbish. I can't see the logic of this, how can one litter a rubbish heap?" (p. 106). The youth offers a flower as a form of apology for his behavior, but the Guardian of Order "moves back in terror" exclaiming, "What is it?" (p. 107). The flower embodies the real (gone) qualities of things and stands in a sharp contrast with the only meaningful token of emotions in the meaninglessness of the modern wasteland. The Old Woman Broods portrays the apocalypse--one of the recurrent Polish themes--and presents a series of variations on the theme of garbage. Garbage emerges as a metaphor for the contemporary world and its civilization. The play illustrates the continuity of the existence of the world in the form of multiplying matter, robots and autocrats; the civilization

Witkacy foresaw half a century earlier. The world in The Old Woman stands for a cemetery of souls where roadsweepers "push off a heap of old newspapers, books, encyclopedias, illustrated magazines, rags, machines, bottles, animals and people: old ones, children, women. Some are real human beings. Some are puppets" (p. 86). In this garbage culture people copulate, the old woman gives birth to one boy and three girls and is sitting on the boy, the waiter wears the dirty bandages from the "third war." The audience looks at this wasteland until, suddenly, "the curtain falls very quickly and does not go up again . . . The curtain could be made of heavy metal. It falls like a sword and cuts the actors off from the spectators" (p. 108). The spectators remain subjected to the influence of the total destruction presented on the stage: the image of people being collected like garbage and the world being shown as a giant rubbish heap and graveyard.

The Theater of the Absurd is one of the means to illustrate the metaphysical anguish of modern man which springs from the absence of any generally accepted cosmic system of values. Therefore the reality with which the Theater of the Absurd is concerned is

> . . . a psychological reality expressed in images that are outward projection of states of mind, fears, dreams, nightmares, and conflicts within the personality of the author, the dramatic tension produced by this kind of play differs fundamentally from the suspense created in a theater concerned

> mainly with the revelation of objective characters through the unfolding of a narrative plot.[17]

Artaud claimed that the theater should aim at expressing what language is incapable of putting into words. The plays of Beckett and Różewicz prove that it is possible to articulate philosophical concerns by mean other than words alone. The Theater of the Absurd is a theater of situation "as against a theater of events in sequence, and therefore it uses language based on patterns of concrete images rather than argument and discursive speech."[18] The dramatic situation as image in Różewicz's and Beckett's plays is reminiscent of surrealist pictures: the barrister without a head, Krapp's tapes, rubbish and mannequins, the revolver and things Winnie takes out of her purse are literal signs; they become the icons of human existence. The first writer to accept the iconicity of the theatrical sign was Jan Kott who argued that "the 'absurd' in language becomes visual and thus a spectacle."[19] In other words, if Beckett or Różewicz wanted to tell the audience about the meaninglessness of human life they could have used elaborate words, but they, instead, decided to show the absurdity of the human condition.

In the plays of S. Beckett and T. Różewicz the pull towards iconicity is apparent. "After a long time of subordination to the word," writes D. Roventa-Frumusani, "the body acquires increasing weight in modern theater; we assist at the transition from a text-based theater to a body-based theater."[20] This observation emphasizes the prevalence of visual codes over auditory ones. In the category of visual codes the kinesic and proxemic codes dominate. The kinesic codes seem to lead to the realm of immobility while proxemic codes distort the verbal interaction in the sense that characters maintain the personal distance while words tend towards silence. The scarcity of architectural and pictorial codes communicates through their very absence and indicates the all-pervading metaphysical vacuity of man's life. In terms of the auditory codes the puto ergo sum formula initiates the march toward silence. The linguistic codes are no longer pregnant with meaning as they convey a metaphysical void. Words devalue because they neither facilitate expression of mental comprehensions nor do they carry any theological overtones. They tend to proliferate as objects being collected in the course of man's life and enter into the domain of verbosity. The plays of Beckett and Różewicz present a boring linguistic pattern full of repetitiousness and discontinuity which indicates the disjunction from self and from the other. The silences and immobility enhance man's sense of isolation and sterility in the modern Wasteland.

3. Communication in the Theater of the Absurd

One of the main motifs of existential philosophy is a preoccupation with the nature of communication. The Theater of the Absurd seems to have been nourished by existentialist thought as it explores the process of communication through dramatic dialog in order to convey the global sense of fragmentation of philosophical ideas, moral and linguistic concepts. The absurdity of the human condition is captured as incommunicability and desire for silence. The eloquent drama of the past has been transformed into elliptical and disruptive linguistic experimentation. "Indeed one of the most characteristic and most innovative aspects of the Theater of the Absurd is," writes D. Sherzer, "that it plays down the referential aspect of language and focuses instead on interactional patterns. The action in these static plays takes place within language rather than with language."[21]

The attention of this chapter now focuses on the breakdown of communication and the crisis of language culminating in retreat from the word. The parlerie of the Theater of the Absurd does not only refer to language and its inability of being a means of communication. The plays focus on generalized collective talk which conveys no information about the individuals themselves. The characters in the Theater of the Absurd have lost their identity and are reduced to the level of cliché. Their dialogs do not follow a logical pattern, but are based on the violation of the principles of normal communication. The exchanges express boredom, emptiness and loneliness dominating the human condition; therefore, these dialogs are full of incongruities and displacements. Language is encroached by silence and the other elements of the Basic Triple Structure of Communication (paralanguage and kinesics) often contradict or neutralize it in a communication act to only create an illusion of communication. Oblique speech, unanswered questions, multiple silences and pauses all evoke an oppressive sensation of entrapment and reinforce an impression of disorientation.

The absurdity of the human condition is portrayed not only through linguistic experimentation. D. Sherzer notes four different techniques which create the absurd. She distinguishes factual absurdity (e.g. in The Bald Soprano a child has one red eye and one white eye, or in El cepillo de dientes Él kills his wife because she used his toothbrush); clownish absurdity (e.g. Clov in Endgame puts a pesticide in his pants to kill a flea); weird semantic juxtaposition (e.g. in Les Chaises the Old Woman asks her husband if he invited the janitors, the bishops, the chemists, the police, the merchants, the building, the pen-holders and the chromosomes)' and socio-economic manipulation (e.g. when the Fire Chief in The Bald Soprano predicts a fire in the other part of the city in an hour and sixteen minutes).[22] The present chapter explores the use of these techniques, the fragmentation of communication and the devaluation of language in the plays of S. Beckett; a Catalán dramatist, M. Pedrolo; H. Pinter; a Chilean playwright, J. Díaz; and E. Ionesco.

In En Attendant Godot, Beckett presents the monotony of man's existence in terms of "waiting" which, essentially, represents existential anguish and despair. The didascalias preceding Act I are extremely short, "Rouite a la campagne, avec arbre. Soir."[23] No information is provided regarding the appearance of the characters. When Estragon appears he is panting and repeatedly trying to remove his shoes. The nonverbal action he is performing and his solitariness evoke an atmosphere of frustration and exhaustion. He states the theme of the play in the first verbal exchange; "Rien a faire" (p. 11) and the conversation begins to develop with Vladimir's question:

> Vladimir (froissé, froidement). -- Peut-on savoir
> où Monsieur a passé la nuit?
> Estragon. -- Dans un fossé.
> Vladimir (épaté). -- Un fossé! Où ça?
> Estragon (sans geste). -- Par là. (p. 12)

In this short exchange the components of the Basic Triple Structure are brought into play. Paralanguage "épaté" seems to contradict the language in Vladimir's response, thus creating an ironic effect in the next exchange. Kinesics contradict language as Estragon replies "sans geste" neutralizing the referential power of "par là." In the following exchange the maxim of relevance is violated:

> Vladimir (rêveusement). -- Le dernier moment . . .
> (Il médite.) C'est long, mais ce sera bon.
> Qui disait ça?
> Estragon. -- Tu ne veux pas m'aider?
> Vladimir. -- Des fois je me dis que ça vient quand
> même. Alors je me sens tout drôle. (p. 14)

This exchange actually produces three unrelated utterances. Vladimir's question is not answered by Estragon, thus violating the principles of causality and informativeness. Estragon answers by means of another question to which he does not receive an answer.

Feebly, Gogo breaks their silence with yet another outburst of energy:

> Estragon. -- Allons-nous-en.
> Vladimir. -- On ne peut pas.
> Estragon. -- Pourquoi?
> Vladimir. -- On attend Godot.
> Estragon. -- C'est vrai. (Un temps.) (p. 20)

Paralanguage contributes to the mood of ennui and is followed by a pause. Pauses announce the advent of silence. Increasingly, their silent commitment is to waiting and to passing the time while waiting for Godot. The four lines reiterate the principle theme of the play.

They evade the reality of their pointless wait by diracting their attention to their memories of the past. The following dialog, through seemingly natural, provides another example of an infringement of the principles of normal communication:

> Vladimir. -- Tu dois confondre avec la Roquette.
> Estragon. -- Possible. Je me rappelle les cartes de la Terre-Sainte. En couleur. Très jolies. La Mer-Morte était bleu pâle. J'avais soif rien qu'en la regardant. Je me disais, c'est là que nous irons passer notre lune de miel. Nous nagerons. Nous serons heureux.
> Vladimir. -- Tu aurais dû être poète.
> Estragon. -- Je l'ai été. (Geste vers ses haillons.) Ça ne se voit pas.
>
> Silence.

> Vladimir. -- Qu'est-ce que je disais . . . Comment
> va ton pied?
> Estragon. -- Il enfle.
> Vladimir. -- Ah oui, j'y suis, cette histoire de
> larrons. Tu t'en souviens?
> Estragon. -- Non.
> Vladimir. -- Tu veux que je te la raconte?
> Estragon. -- Non.
> Vladimir. -- Ça passera le temps. (Un temps.)
> (p. 17)

When Estragon answers the question about the Gospels, he flouts the principles of causality and common knowledge as well as the principles of informativeness and manner. This response points to an essential implicature. Estragon's answer dealing with earthly things such as maps, colors, thirst, honeymoon, and swimming stands in sharp contrast to Vladimir's preoccupation with the spiritual and the abstract. Estragon openly manifests his interest in the corporeal and the concrete, implying his disbelief in the power of myths. Vladimir's statement, "Tu aurais dû être poète" leads to Estragon's "Je l'ai été." This short answer seems to violate the principle of truthfulness unless his rags are taken to represent the supporting evidence. The gesture bringing kinesics into play enhances language. Then he asks a rhetorical question which Vladimir ignores and enquires about Estragon's injured foot. Having been provided with an answer "il enfle," Vladimir unceremoniously violates the principle of causality and common knowledge by replying, "Ah oui, j'y suis, cette histoire de larrons." He, in turn, asks if Estragon remembers the story and receives the clear answer, "Non." He persists in his story in spite of Estragon's clear reluctance to carry on the conversation. The same pattern is repeated in the exchange that follows and Vladimir concludes that telling the story "passera le temps." Even though one may have expected that Vladimir persisting in his story to illustrate an important point contradicts it himself by saying, "Ça passera le temps."

Throughout the play, Vladimir and Estragon engage in games to alleviate their existential ennui, e.g. "En attendant, essayons de converser sans nous exalter" etc. The most dramatic solution to their hopeless condition is suggested when they come up with the idea of hanging themselves. They go through the formulae of politeness completely inappropriate for such a situation:

> Vladimir. -- Essaie.
> Estragon. -- Après toi.
> Vladimir. -- Mais non, toi d'abord.
> Estragon. -- Pourquoi?
> Vladimir. -- Tu pèses moins lourd que moi.
> Estragon. -- Justement.
> Vladimir. -- Je ne comprends pas.
> Estragon. -- Mais réfléchis un peu, voyons.
>
> Vladimir réfléchit.
>
> Vladimir (finalement). -- je ne comprends pas.
> Estragon. -- Je vais t'expliquer. (Il réfléchit.) la branche . . . la branche . . . (Avec colère.) Mais essaie donc de comprendre!
> Vladimir. -- Je ne compte plus que sur toi.
> Estragon (avec effort). -- Gogo léger -- branche pas casser -- Gogo mort. Didi lourd -- branche casser -- Didi seul. (Un temps.)
> (p. 26)

The initial exchange is reminiscent of a scene in front of a door and the absurd tone appears when Vladimir explains that Estragon is lighter and that is why he should hang himself first. So far the verbal-vocal form of communication has prevailed. When Vladimir is asked to use his intelligence an obscure didascalia appears. "Vladimir réfléchit" which does not provide any references to vocal non-verbal paralanguage or non-vocal non-verbal (kinesics) forms of communication. Vladimir's answer about remaining "Je ne comprends pas" illustrates most bitterly the collapse of Reason. Estragon's growing irritation with Vladimir's apparent inability to reason is indicated by paralanguage: "avec colère." Estragon's explanation "avec effort" which may be evoked by both paralanguage and kinesics contradicts the form of language that follows. "Avec effort" gives rise to the implication of a highly complex metaphysical explanation but the utterance that ensues is the exact embodiment of the contrary. Language disintegrates into a bundle of simplistic phrases, as in the speech of a child, devoid of grammatical foundation. Nevertheless, it does evoke a tone of existential despair in impeding loneliness as a result of Didi's unsuccessful attempt at suicide.

The communication process is infringed due to the lack of common knowledge (or, common memory, in particular). They are unable to remember how long they have been together and whether they were there together the previous day. In the scene when Pozzo decides to leave the following exchange takes place:

> Estragon. -- Alors adieu.
> Pozzo. -- Adieu.
> Vladimir. -- Adieu.
> Estragon. -- Adieu.
>
> Silence. Personne ne bouge.
>
> Vladimir. -- Adieu.
> Pozzo. -- Adieu.
> Estragon. -- Adieu.
>
> Silence.
>
> Pozzo. -- Et merci.
> Vladimir. -- Merci à vous.
> Pozzo. -- De rien.
> Estragon. -- Mais si.
> Pozzo. -- Mais non.
> Vladimir. -- Mais si.
> Estragon. -- Mais non.
>
> Silence. (p. 79)

This scene is prolonged by a kind of verbal ping-pong game in which the characters engage. The sounds are bounced like little balls back and forth. There are no references for paralanguage. Kinesics again contradicts the verbal behavior: "Adieu" is juxtaposed to "Personne ne bouge."

A similar kind of verbal game occurs when Vladimir and Estragon stare at Lucky, "Estragon et Vladimir, s'enhardissant peu à peu, tournent autour de Lucky, l'inspectent sur toutes les coutures." (p. 39). Then the verbal exchange follows:

> Vladimir. -- Regarde-moi ça!
> Estragon. -- Quoi?
> Vladimir (indiquant). -- Le cou.
> Estragon (regardant le cou). -- Je ne vois rien.
> Vladimir. -- Mets-toi ici.
>
> Estragon se met à la place de Vladimir.

> Estragon. -- En effet.
> Vladimir. -- A vif.
> Estragon. -- C'est la corde.
> Vladimir. -- A force de frotter.
> Estragon. -- Qu'est-ce que tu veux?
> Vladimir. -- C'est le noeud.
> Estragon. -- C'est fatal.
>
> Ils reprennent leur inspection, s'arrêtent au visage. (p. 39)

At the beginning of the exchange kinesics (pointing) amplifies language. Then there follows an infringement of the proxemic rules. Estragon goes beside Vladimir, within "personal distance," which is acceptable between them, they both, however, get too close to Lucky and invade his private space. Nevertheless, they do not establish communication with Lucky, but rather treat him as a strange specimen of animality and discuss his appearance as if Lucky were not a person. Their behavior accompanying the verbal exchange is highly improper and would not be expected in a normal situation of communication.

The most vivid example of the breakdown of communication is provided by the speech of Lucky, who is commanded to think and entertain the others and who delivers the following incoherent ramblings:

> Etant donné l'existence telle qu'elle jaillit des récents travaux publics de Poinçon et Wattmann d'un Dieu personnel quaquaquaqua à barbe blanche quaqua hors du temps de l'étendue qui du haut de sa divine apathie sa divine athambie sa divine aphasie nous aime bien à quelques exceptions près on ne sait pourquoi . . . (p. 72)

Lucky's oration has no punctuation, no pauses to logically gather thoughts, and repetitions defy the principles of logic and syntax. The words blend the uselessness of language and the futility of knowledge. This speech reinforces the sense of isolation and alienation from others that is a basic destiny of all character. The silences evoke evanescence and emptiness; repetitions and unanswered questions convey uncertainty and confusion and deny any possibility of maintaining the communication process. When Lucky returns in Act II he is dumb and his dumbness reflects the ultimate impossibility of human contact and futility of knowledge.

Estragon's declaration stating, "On trouve toujours quelque chose, hein, Didi, pour nous donner l'impression d'exister" (p. 117) is echoed in the following short exchange:

> Visitor: Is that the game for today?
> Resident: Yes, I just got through inventing it.

The passage comes from Cruma written in 1957 by the Catalán dramatist, Mañuel de Pedrolo.[24] The title is the same as an Etruscan unit of measurement and the play deals with the existential problem of communication. The underlying premise is the Heideggerian notion of "authenticity" of the human being. In order to be an authentic phenomenon it has to be empirically tangible otherwise it is not possible to attain a direct knowledge of it. The play centers around the problem of how authentic we are in our existence and whether we can communicate our experiences to other human beings. The initial situation presenting a Visitor and a Resident engaging themselves in a conversation is reminiscent of the opening scene of Waiting for Godot:

> Visitor: Everything the same. (He looks around.) Everything's always the same.
> Resident: (shutting the door). Nothing ever changes. (p. 11)

The reply in the form of a repetition of the most basic aspect of human condition, its tragic ennui and constant sameness, brings the mood of existential anguish and despair. The Resident has brought a measuring tape to measure the walls and the Visitor is about to help him:

> Resident: (shaking his head): No . . . I don't know. Everything's always been the same, hasn't it?
> Visitor: Always. Me alone. You alone. Others alone.
> Resident: Always playing.
> Visitor: Always playing. At being together. At doing something. Right now, at measuring . . .
> Resident: At measuring.
> Visitor: Yes, have you forgotten? You invented it.
> Resident: You may be right. But what's the point of it?
> Visitor: I don't know. But right now it's the only thing to do--so let's measure.
> Resident: (after a pause): Let's measure. (p. 12)

This scene points out the fact that people choose to be inauthentic in contact with others and merely invent games to let them pass the time. The game the Visitor and Resident invent turns out to be pointless when they discover their measuring tapes are blank:

> Visitor: It doesn't? (Both of them examine it.) I could have sworn it had some . . .
> Resident: Me too.

Visitor: (astonished): You too? But you've never seen it before!
Resident: I meant mine. It used to have numbers too.
Visitor: I don't understand it . . .
Resident: The fact is that we don't understand anything. (p. 21)

Communication is established between the two characters. There is a logical exchange of utterances leading, however, to a bitter conclusion which Beckett presented in his exclamation from Godot: "People are bloody ignorant apes!" It is impossible to measure or give concrete meaning to the condition of modern man. Moreover, the characters even doubt their own identity. When they hear a voice calling Nagaio, the following exchange takes place:

Visitor: Maybe they're calling us.
Resident: (startled): Us?
Visitor: Could be.
Resident: (shaking his head): No. Neither of us is named Nagaio.
Visitor: How do we know that? We might be.
Resident: (a bit irritably): You're joking, aren't you?
Visitor: No. Anyone could be Nagaio. Nobody knows the name they give him.
Resident: That who give him.
Visitor: Others.
(p. 16)

The above exchange indicates that we exist only insofar as others perceive us and attach "an identity tag" to us. When a woman called Nagaio appears in a window of an apartment on the other side of the courtyard and asks who called her while the Resident and Visitor attempt to establish contact with her:

Visitor: Answer her.
Resident: What shall I say?

> Visitor: Something, anything.
> Resident: (to the woman, pitifully) We are two . . .
> Nagaio: Did you call me?
> Resident: (becoming animated): We are measuring with our hands since the tape measure turned to be blank.
> Nagaio: Do you live here?
> Resident: It sounded to us as if they were calling from below.
>
> ……………………………………
>
> Visitor: Do you live alone?
> Nagaio: I'm expecting visitors later.
> Resident: You haven't said yes or no to us.
> Nagaio: (closing the window): See you soon. So long.
>
> (p. 22)

The Resident's attempt to communicate with Nagaio is enhanced by kinesics: "becoming animated," but does not result in contact. Her two questions remain unanswered in the proper way. The Resident's answers violate the principles of causality and informativeness. When the Visitor attempts to communicate with her, "Do you live alone?", he receives an irrelevant answer. Her response infringes upon the principles of causality, informativeness, and, possibly, truthfulness. Neither the Visitor nor the Resident is able to establish communication with the external reality represented by Nagaio.

The Resident is oblivious of external reality to such an extent that he is unable to distinguish a Stranger from his friend, the Visitor. His attempts at communication with the Stranger fail due to the violation of the principle of common knowledge. Esslin calls Cruma a study in human isolation and argues that "the greater the inner reality or authenticity of a human being, the less able he is to establish contact with the outside world, in its crudity and deceptiveness."[25] The Resident, then, emerges as the most authentic one of all, as he is unable to relate himself to others and he is the one probing the boundaries of his inner reality. The less authentic men are, the easier it is for them to communicate with others, says Pedrolo's message.

In H. Pinter's The Dumb Waiter there are two killers enclosed in a room waiting for instructions regarding their next crime. The men, Gus and Ben, entertain themselves by talking in order to hide the growing anxiety. Gus is the one who wonders what time the mysterious "he" is getting in touch with them (to give them instructions) and who the victim will be this time. They fail to agree whether it is proper to say "to light the kettle" or to "light the gas" and they are appalled to learn from the paper that a girl of eight killed a cat. Their reaction is not appropriate to their own situation and their behavior may represent an example of "factual absurdity" (normally, professional killers would not be disturbed by such news). The resulting incongruity is one of the devices used to create absurdity in the play. Even though Gus and Ben are isolated from the external world, there is a serving hatch, "a dumb waiter," in their basement through which various meal orders come down. After some time Gus identifies the man sending orders with the one providing them with instructions, but he fails to establish a logical link between them.

In contrast to Ben, Gus also fails to establish any contact through the tube. In the scene when Ben forces Gus to give him his instructions, "Gus sighs and sits next to Ben on the bed. The instructions are stated and repeated automatically."[26] A manipulation of proxemic rules indicates the level of friendliness between Gus and Ben; that is, Ben accepts the personal distance as something natural, not as a violation of his personal space. The instructions are "repeated automatically," which provides the dialog with an uncanny and mechanical quality. The following verbal exchange materializes Gus's fate:

> Ben: He won't know you're there.
> Gus: He won't know you're there.
> Ben: He won't know you're there.
> Gus: He won't know I'm there.
> Ben: I take out may gun.
> Gus: You take out your gun.
> Ben: He stops in his tracks.
> Gus: He stops in his tracks.
> Ben: If he turns round--
> Gus: If he turns round--
> Ben: You're there.
> Gus: I'm there. (p. 65)

This exchange draws attention to the important of deixis. Deixis is defined as

> the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities being talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatiotemporal context created and sustained by the act of utterance and participation in it.[27]

Deixis fulfills several functions in drama, which constitutes a special kind of discourse marked by the dominance of "I" and "you" over "he." Therefore, any shift of deictic hierarchy captures the attention not only at the level of characters but also at the level of character-audience communication. Deixis enforces ostension, one of two components of theatrical performance and it actualizes the message in the sense of being a mediator between speech and gesture. Thus when Gus makes a mistake saying, "He won't know you're there" referring to Ben as "you" and is corrected by Ben to say, "He won't know I'm there" the change of the deictic marker establishes the presence of Gus's body in the setting at the stage when the message conveyed in the exchange materializes itself. Gus is ostended as a victim by deixis long before the final scene takes place. The dialog also reminds one of a verbal ping-pong game in slow motion. The same sounds are being repeated and bounced back which provides the dialog with a peculiar rigidity. The repetition of similar sound patterns within dialogs is another characteristic of the plays in the Theater of the Absurd.

The conclusion of The Dumb Waiter is pervaded by ambiguity enhances by the non-verbal components of the Basic Triple Structure. In the last scene Ben receives an order through the pipe while Gus is having a glass of water behind the door. Apparently, he received the order he has been waiting for. He calls Gus, but Gus is still outside. Then the pantomime scene takes place:

> Gus!
>
> The door opens sharply. Ben turns, his revolver levelled at the door.
> Gus stumbles in.
> He is stripped of his jacket, waistcoat, tie, holster, and revolver.
> He stops, body stooping, his arms at his sides.
> He raises his head and looks at Ben.
> A long silence.
> They stare at each other.

This is a remarkable illustration of the manner in which one element of the Basic Triple Structure takes over the other ones. In this case language becomes dominated by kinesics. Gus does not walk in, but he stumbles in, which emphasizes the idea that he is there unwillingly (as stumbling arises the connotation of hesitation or something causing difficulty). "Stooping" refers to his readiness to accept his fate and "stooping" evokes the connotation of his lowering himself morally in front of Ben. When Gus raises his head it becomes the final indication of his willingness to accept what follows. Then he looks at Ben. For the first time, the killer and the victim (Gus has just become a victim) confront each other. There is a long silence stressing their mutual astonishment and, instead of words, they just stare at each other. M. Cook and M. Lalljee in "Verbal Substitution for Visual Signals in Interaction" make quite a few interesting observations regarding the significance of sign substitution.

They claim that "Gaze direction can communicate liking and status, can regulate emotional tone of conversation and can indicate speaker's attitude to what he is saying."[28] To stare means to "look fixedly with wide open eyes." Although Gus and Ben look at each other in this way, their gaze communicates different things now than ever in the past. Ben is in a state of panic over his decision whether to follow the instruction or his conscience. More importantly, the final act of communication dwells on ambiguity both between Gus and Ben and between them and the audience. The spectators have to reach their own verdict. The communication act is caught in a "still"--it remains unsolved. It does not mean, however, that absence or silence does not communicate. Pinter argues that silence is communication, "We communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and . . . what takes place is continual evasion, desperate rear-guard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves."[29] The dramatist himself argues that

> There are two silences. One is when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is employed. This is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished, or mocking smoke-screen which keeps the other in its place.[30]

Another type of experimentation with language occurs in El cepillo de dientes, a play by the Chilean dramatist, Jorge Díaz. Two principal characters, Él and Ella, like other characters in the Theater of the Absurd, pass the time by playing games. We meet them at their morning routine: "paper and breakfast." Their conversation consists of the exchange of newspaper slogans intertwined with their own comments until he announces that he wants to tell her something that really tortures him:

> Él: Creo . . .
> Ella: Si?
> Él: Creo que estoy emerzando a enamorarme.
> Ella: (Conmiseración). Oh, pobre.
> Él: Créeme que me he resistido hasta lo ultimo.
> Ella: Y de qué mujerzuela, se puede saber?
> Él: No la llames así!
> Ella: Por qué? De quién te has enamorado?
> Él: (Vacilante y tímido.) De . . . ti.
> Ella: Que tontería!
> Él: No es una tontería. Todos los días mientras leo el periódico durante el desayuno pienso en tí. Cuando vamos por la calle te miro por el rabillo del ojo. Es enteramente absurdo, pero me gustas mucho.[31]

The scene is reminiscent of the famous scene of recognition of the Martins in The Bald Soprano by Ionesco. The Martins discover that they are married, while Él discovers that he is falling in love with his own wife. Él himself calls it absurd. There seems to be one incongruity in the logic of the scene: Él should have mentioned that he had fallen in love before he married Ella which would be completely normal, but falling in love after marrying the woman reverses the traditional pattern.

Their conversation continues and circles around newspaper clips which are picked up by him and her and serve as improvisation guidelines. The mini-monologues do not form a consistent conversational pattern but merely coexist devoid of the principles of causality, informativeness and truthfulness. Occasionally, the characters themselves comment about the meaning of their talk:

> Ella: Espérate un poco . . . De qué estábamos hablando?
> Él: No sé. (Los dos comen un momento silenciosamente. Ella de pronto, da un grito.)
> Ella: Era acerca del jabón de afeitar.
> Él: El qué?
> Ella: De lo que hablábamos.
> Él: No creo. Es un tema idiota. (Un silencio tenso. Ella en su revista. Él en su periódico.) (p. 443)

Comments as the above one "una tema idiota" are intermingled with silences and sudden exclamations. They are followed by unrelated statements such as the ones in the exchange of orders:

> Ella: (Muy cariñosa.) Amorcito . . .
> Él: Sí, mi amor? . . .
> Ella: Por favor . . .
> Él: Sí?
> Ella: Fíjate un poco más.
> Él: En qué?
> Ella: No ensucies el mantel.
> Él: No me lo digas todos los días!
> Ella: (Subiendo el tono.) No hagas ruidos al comer!
> Él: No hagas sonar la cucharilla!
> Ella: No mojes el azúcar!
> Él: No frunzas la cejas al morder la tostadas!
> Ella: No arrastres los pies!
> Él: (Gritando.) No leas en la mesa!
> Ella: (Gritando.) No grites!
> Él: No me escupas! (p. 448)

The exchange is commenced by Ella in a loving voice which gradually changes to screaming. These are only two references to paralanguage ("cariñoso" and "gritando"). The exchange lacks the principles of causality, informativeness and does not serve the development of conversation.

The climax of the act is reached when Él learns that Ella has used his toothbrush to color her shoes. Él calls his toothbrush "único objeto personal, el refugio de individualidad" (p. 452). Ella tries to persuade him that it was a wedding gift from her father and emphasizes that they are man and wife: "Es el matrimonio. La compartición de todo: dolor, angustia, alegría, y cepillos de dientes! . . ." (p. 453). He does not approve of this idea which results in a series of insults being hurled at each other:

Ella: Sádico!
Él: Orgánica!
Ella: Muérdago!
Él: Mandrágora!
Ella: Tóxico!
Él: Crustáceo!

The words do not make sense in terms of semantics, but are thrown together to follow a phonetic pattern thus attaching new meanings to the words otherwise not used in such a context, e.g. muérdago is a mistletoe. Él "kills" Ella because she has used his toothbrush, but she reappears as the maid, Antona, in the second act. New verbal games follow. Él tells them seriously and Antona treats them equally seriously:

Antona: Y la señora?
Él: "Requiescat in pace".
Antona: Qué dice?
Él: Que duerme como una muerta.
Antona: No diga eso, que trae mala suerte. A veces pasan cosas terribles. Un tío mío,

> el pobre, se durmió cantando . . . y se
> amaneció afónico. (p. 461)

This is a fine example of both factual and logical absurdity. Another one follows when announces that he is going to be a mother. Él's investigation of Antona also brings about another display of logical absurdity:

> Él: Religión?
> Antona: Homeópata.
> Él: Estado?
> Antona: Un día sí y otro no.
> Él: Víctima?
> Antona: La señora del 36: una santa.
> Él: Arma homicia?
> Antona: Transistor de alta infidelidad. (p. 480)

All the questions asked by Él remain unanswered. The principles of causality, common knowledge, informativeness and truthfulness are violated and as a result no communication is established.

The questions asked by Antona are answered by Él by inappropriate kind of discourse, e.g.:

> Antona: Qué ha pasado?
> Él: (Cantando el conocido tango de Gardel.)
> "Sus ojos se cerraron
> y el mundo sigue andando.
> Su boca que era mía
> ya no me besa más . . ." (p. 477)

Antona's question is serious and Él answers by singing to the tune of a popular tango to describe the "death" of his wife. This creates a shocking incongruity.

Another characteristic of a dialog in an absurdist play is the occurrence of proverbial clichés which do not develop the dialog but just generate an empty discourse. Remembering the proverbs helps to pass the time. The most absurd love scene takes place when Él and Ella begin a love game and get carried away by advertising slogans:

> Él: Qué bien hueles!
> Ella: (Coqueta.) Se que te vuelve loco. Es el superdetergente tamaño gigante Bimpo.
> Él: (Cariñoso.) No digas tonterías, cariño . . . Ya te he dicho que yo sólo me descontrolo con Tersol, "que brilla en su cocina como un sol . . ."
> Ella: (Impaciente.) No seas testarudo . . . "Solo Bimpo huele a Bimpo."
> Él: "Hace tiempo que hice mi elección: insisto en Tersol."
> Ella: "Bimpo es mas blanco y contiene Feno 32!"
>
> ....
>
> Él: (Aullando.) Tersol!!
> Ella: (Aullando.) Bimpo!! (p. 490)

This is the most direct illustration of the devaluation of language in an absurdist play. It sheds light on how superficial meaningless slogans literally take over the expression of meaningful moral values (in this case, love). The devaluation of language precludes any possibility of establishing an authentic contact. The principles of informativeness and truthfulness are seriously infringed; consequently, no real communication is possible.

The characters of Ionesco's La cantatrice chauve also haphazardly quote pseudo-proverbs and aphorisms to maintain their conversation. Their talk, however, consists of a series of illogical tales that they narrate. Communication is disrupted in Ionesco's play and a meaningful exchange of ideas is impossible. The Revzins explain the phenomenon of incommunicability in the following way:

> Ordinarily, we call Ionesco's theater the theater of the absurd. A semiotic analysis of his plays approximates an explanation of what in particular is absurd in his plays.
>
> Violation of the postulates of communication is not only experimental but also artistic device which may be termed the device of the absurd. The strikingness of this effect attests to the important role of the postulates of normal communication. The impossibility of finding truth, the advent of the cliche and of automatism and the loss of informativeness in their reoccurrence are all features which are persistently and tragically felt by man in the world surrounding Eugene Ionesco.[32]

At the beginning of La cantatrice chauve, "La pendule anglaise frappe dix-sept coups anglais" and introduces us to the impossible world of Ionesco.[33] The play opens with Mrs. Smith taking to Mr. Smith who "continuant sa lecture, fait claquer sa langue" (pp. 17-19). Mrs. Smith talks about a doctor who always tries out the medicine on himself first before administering it to his patient. Mr. Smith claims that "un mêdicin consciencieux doit mourir avec le malade s'ils ne peuvent pas guérir ensemble. Le commandant d'un bateau périt avec le bateau, dans les vagues. Il ne lui survit pas" (p. 19). Mrs. Smith objects to this statement:

Mme. Smith:	On ne peut comparer un malade à un bateau.
M. Smith:	Pourquoi pas? Le bateau a aussi ses maladies; d'ailleurs ton docteur est aussi sain qu'un vaisseau; voilà pourquoi encore il devait périr en même temps que le malade comme le docteur et son bateau.

> Mme. Smith: Ah! Je n'y avais pas pensé . . . C'est peut-être juste . . . et alors, quelle conclusion en tires tu?
> M. Smith: C'est que tous les docteurs ne sont que des charlatans. Et tous les malades aussi. (p. 19)

In this case the dialog seemingly develops and leads to the conclusion uttered by Mr. Smith. The conclusion that all the doctors are quacks violates the principle of causality and does not follow logically from what has been said previously. The Smiths then proceed to talk about a Bobby Watson, but again no communication is established as they lack common knowledge in the case; or as the Revzins would say: the process of communication is not normal as a result of violation of the principle of identity of the subject. The exchange of empty phrases between the Smiths is interrupted by the appearance of the maid:

> Mary (entrant): Je suis la bonne. J'ai passé un après-midi très agréable. J'ai été au cinéma avec un homme et j'ai vu un fim acec des femmes. A la sorti du cinéma, nous sommes allés boire de l'eau-de-vie et du lait et puis on a lu le journal.
> Mme. Smith: J'espère que vous avez passé un après-midi très agréable, que vous êtes allée au cinema avec un homme et que vous avez bu de l'eau-de-vie et du lait.
> M. Smith: Et le journal. (p. 23)

This exchange again illustrates the breakdown of communication. Mrs. Smith does not communicate anything new to Mary, but merely repeats what Mary has said. Her utterances infringe on the principle of informativeness. When Mrs. Smith scolds Mary for going out, Mary replies:

Mary: C'est vous qui m'avez donnée la permission.
M. Smith: On ne l'a pas fait exprès!
Mary: (éclate de rire. Puis, elle pleure. Elle sourit.) Je me suis acheté un pot de chambre. (p. 23)

In this short passage it is interesting to note the presence of the other elements of the Basic Triple Structure. When Mr. Smith says that they did not give Mary permission "on purpose" she bursts into laughter, then bursts into tears, and, finally, she smiles. She brings paralanguage and kinesics into play which, however, do not even modify the language as what follows violates the principles of causality and informativeness. The sudden changes of Mary's moods may only enhance the atmosphere of absurdity.

The most absurd of the play occurs when Mr. and Mrs. Martin recognize themselves as man and wife. They reveal that they took the same train to London, that they stayed at the same apartment and, finally, that they have a daughter who is blond, has a white eye and a red eye, is very pretty and her name is Alice. Mr. Martin continues:

M. Martin: (même voix traînante, monotone) Comme c'est curieux et quelle coincidence! C'est bizzare.! C'est peut-être la même, chère Madame!
Mme Martin: Comme c'est curieux! C'est bien possible, chèr Monsieur.
(Un assez long moment de silence . . . La pendule sonne vingt-neuf fois. M. Martin, après avoir longuement reflechi, se level lentement et, sans se presser, se dirige vers Mme. Martin, qui s'est levée, elle, aussi, tout doucement,

M. Martin a la mème voix rare, monotone, vaguement chantante)

M. Martin: Alors, chère Madame, je crois qu'il n'y a pas de doute, nous nous sommes déjà vus et vous êtes ma propre épouse . . . Elizabeth, je t'ai retrouvée!
(Mme. Martin s'approche de M. Martin sans se presser. Ils s'embrassent sans expression.)

Mme. Martin: Donald, c'est toi, darling!
(Ils s'assoient dans le même fauteuil, se tiennent embrassés et s'endorment) (p. 28)

Each new coincidence of this lengthy exchange is accompanied by exclamations: "How curious!" "How bizarre!" "What a coincidence!" which stress the repetitiveness and monotony of the dialog. Paralanguage, "same drawling, monotone voice," clearly contradicts the excitement and anxiety indicated by the language. The clock strikes twenty-nine times to introduce to absurdity of final recognition. The kinesic and proxemic systems are evoked as Mr. Martin slowly gets up and moves, unhurriedly, toward Mrs. Martin. The kinesic and proxemic signs do not amplify the linguistic utterance that follows. Paralanguage, "the same flat, monotonous voice," also seems to contradict the joyful outburst, "Elizabeth, I have found you again!" Mrs. Martin approaches Mr. Martin without haste and they embrace without expression. Clearly, kinesis contradicts language. Mrs. Martin exclaims, "Donald, it's you, darling!" and they sit together and fall asleep. The kinesic behavior is completely incongruous with the verbal one which intensifies the absurdity of the whole scene. The Revzins claim that

> Except that the conversation is between husband and wife, there is nothing unusual about this conversation. The paradox of this scene lies precisely in the fact that the dialog occurs between two people who, because of their relationship should be quite aware of everything that they are talking about now in this scene, and should not permit it as new information.[34]

Another example of complete contradiction of language by kinesics occurs in the scene with the Fire Chief. Mrs. Smith invites him to sit down and take off his helmet:

> Mme. Smith: Monsieur le Capitaine, puisque vous nous avez aidés à mettre tout cela au clair, mettez-vous à l'aise, enlevez votre casque et asseyez-vous un instant.
>
> Le Pompier: Excusez-moi, mais je ne peut pas rester longtemps. Je veux bien enlever mon casque, mais je n'ai pas le temps de m'asseoir. (Il s'assoit, sans enlever son casque). (p. 38)

The Fire Chief announces that he would like to remove his helmet, but he does not have time to sit down. Then kinesics comes into play and entirely contradicts language: the Chief sits down without removing his helmet!

Throughout the play, Ionesco explores the possibilities of incommunicability. The characters engaging in conversation violate the principles of causality, common knowledge, informativeness, truthfulness and manner. Consequently, communication becomes impossible. Language fails as a means of communication. Kinesics and paralanguage amplify the failure of language which slowly disintegrates into its constitutive elements.

The final scene of the play focuses on the total breakdown of communication. The characters are carried away by the phonetic similarities of the words and start throwing homonymous phrases at one another which disintegrate gradually changing into separate words, syllables, vowels and consonants. Although La cantatrice chauve is rooted in a verbal comedy, Ionesco expanded it as an illustration of "the death of language." R. A. Swanson in "Ionesco's Classical Absurdity" argues that "The Bald Soprano is an anti-pièce because its material, language, works against its own aims; the anti-play remains "theater," however, (essentially classical theater) because, in its form-content identity, it exposes the humorous tragedy of language."[35] Language is separated from reality and reality is stripped of its linguistic familiarity. The conventions blindly accepted by the characters reduce the language to clichés and deny individual interpretation of thought.

Meaningful communication cannot consist in an exchange of clichés; it may be established only by the tension between clichés and original contribution. H. G. Blocker argues that

> Ionesco's view of communication is considerably richer and more complex than is generally recognized. Although ordinary communication takes place within, and even requires, that naive absorption in social stereotypes in which linguistic forms are simply transparent, ideal communication, Ionesco believes, exists only within a tension between the conventional forms of expression and individual perception.[36]

Behind the tragedy of language embodied in the breakdown of communication, the plays of the Theater of the Absurd represent an attack on universal pettiness and conformity in many spheres of human life. One of the most pronounced features is the lack of interest in the metaphysical dimension of the world. M. Esslin rightly points out that

> The Smiths, the Martins can no longer talk because they can no longer think; they can no longer think because they can no longer be moved, can no longer feel passions. They can no longer be; they can become anybody, anything, for, having lost their identity, they assume the identity of others . . . they are interchangeable.[37]

The characters come to resemble the puppets that appear in the circus, revue or pantomime. The plays of Beckett, Ionesco and Różewicz combine the elements of clowning and fooling which advocate a return to non-verbal forms of theater. The music-hall routines with hats in En attendant Godot, the vaudevillan acts performed by Krapp, the proliferation of things in The Old Woman Broods, the clowning with the sounds and meanings of the words, all these elements contribute to the presence of humor in the Theater of the Absurd. Ionesco explains his contribution to the tragicomic genre in the following passage:

> It seems to me that the comic is tragic, and that the tragedy of man is pure derision. In Victims of Duty I tried to sink comedy in tragedy: in The Chairs tragedy is comedy, or if you like to confront comedy and tragedy in order to link them in a new dramatic synthesis. But it is not a true synthesis for these two elements do not coalesce, they coexist . . .[38]

The constant occurrence of comic characters in serious situations or tragic characters in comic situations emphasizes the absurdity which is not only conveyed in their helpless condition, but also manifests itself through language. The frequent repetitions of sounds and expressions constitute a comic device because they impose a machine-like rigidity to the characters' speech and, at the same time, they attract attention to the phonic properties of language.

The dramatists of the Absurd manipulate language in various ways to dramatize discontinuity and disjunction. The most frequent devices generating the absurd are the repetitions and bouncing of sounds, pauses, silences; the use of synonyms, proverbs and clichés; unanswered questions and contrapuntal speech; the colloquial dialogs creating the illusion of communication and the constant neutralization of language through kinesics. The characters "use the language in a very idiosyncratic way. They have their own logic, one which contributes to rendering them absurd."[39] The plays of the Theater of the Absurd abound in nonverbal gestures and speech concludes in silent tableaux to reflect the detachment both within characters and between them. The encroachment of silence emerges as a sign of increasing absence, alienation and solitariness of man among men.

Notes

[1] F. Ionesco, Théâtre (11), Paris: Gallimard, 1954, p. 175. All subsequent references to the play quote the page numbers from this edition and are cited in the text.

[2] C. Solórzano, Teatro breve (Mexico: J. Mortiz, 1977) p. 23. All subsequent references to the play quote the page numbers from this edition and are cited in the text.

[3] M. Mrożek. Striptease, Tango, Vatzlav (New York: Grove Press, 1981) p. 8. All subsequent references to the play quote the page numbers from this edition and are cited in the text.

[4] D. Rudzka, L'aube de l'absurde (Lund: CWK, 1978) p. 158.

[5] Ibid., p. 156.

[6] M. Łos, Communist Ideology, Law, and Crime (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988) p. 156.

[7] Ibid., p. 55.

[8] S. Mrożek, Six Plays (New York: Grove Press, 1967) p. 11. All subsequent references to the play quote the page numbers from this edition and are cited in the text.

[9] D. Rudzka, p. 149.

[10] S. Mrożek, p. 16. All subsequent references to the play quote the page numbers from this edition and are cited in the text.

[11] T. Parkinson, "The Art of Loneliness," The Ohio Review (Spring, 1977) p. 6.

[12] S. Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape (New York: Grove Press, 1960). All subsequent references to the play quote the page numbers from this edition and are cited in the text.

[13] T. Różewicz, The Witnesses and Other Plays, tr. Adam Czerniowski (London: Calder and Boyers, 1970) p. 110. All subsequent references to the play quote the page numbers from this edition and are cited in the text.

[14] Both Krapp's Last Tape (1958) and Happy Days (1961) were written originally in English. En attendant Godot was written between October, 1948, and January, 1949, and was originally created in French. The status of Beckett as a bilingual writer has been neglected by critics who simply analyzed his works in either English or French, with no particular regard to the language and the chronological order in which the works were written. B. Fitch, in his recent book devoted to the problematic of Beckett as a bilingual writer, suggests that one way to approach Beckett's works is to take the first version of each of Beckett's works as an object of study. This seems to me a valid and adequate method of analysis; therefore, I will be quoting from the French version of Waiting for Godot (which was written in Beckett's "French period" of 1945-1952), but from the English versions of Happy Days and Krapp's Last Tape, which were both originally written in English. B. Fitch's book, Beckett and Babel: An Investigation into the Status of the Bilingual World was published in Toronto by the University of Toronto Press in 1988.

[15] S. Beckett, Happy Days (New York: Grove Press, 1961) p. 7. All subsequent references to the play quote the page numbers from this edition and are cited in the text.

[16] T. Różewicz, The Witnesses and Other Plays, tr. Adam Czerniowski (London: Calder and Boyers, 1970) p. 61. All subsequent references to the play quote the page numbers from this edition and are cited in the text.

[17] M. Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (London: Penguin, 1980), p. 415.

[18] Ibid., p. 403.

[19] J. Kott, The Theatre of Essence (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1984) p. 131.

[20] D. Roventa-Frumusani, "The Articulation of the Semiotic Codes in the Theatre of the Absurd," p. 321, in E. W. B. Hess-Luttich (ed.) Multimedial Communication (Tubingen: Muller and Bass, 1982).

[21] D. Sherzer, "Dialogic Incongruities in the Theatre of the Absurd," Semiotics, 22-3, (1978), 269-285, p. 283.

[22] Ibid., p. 270.

[23] S. Beckett, En Attendant Godot (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1952) p. 11. All subsequent quotations are from this edition and page references are cited in the text.

[24] G. Wellworth (ed.), 3 Catalan Dramatists (Montreal: Engendra, 1976) pp. 9-34. Quoted from p. 11. All subsequent quotations are from this edition and page references are cited in the text.

[25] M. Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (London: Penguin, 1980) p. 283.

[26] H. Pinter, The Room and The Dumb Waiter (London: Methuen, 1968) p. 64. All subsequent quotations are from this edition and page references are cited in the text.

[27] W. Kagendoorn, "Notes on Deixis and Simultaneity in Theatre Performance," Degrés, 30 (1982) e-e6, p. e1.

[28] M. Cook and M. Lalljee, "Verbal Substitutes for Visual Signals in Encounters Interaction," Semiotica, 6 (1972) 212-221, p. 215.

[29] H. Pinter, "Between the Lines," speech to the Seventh National Student Drama Festival in Bristol, Sunday Times (London), 4 March 1962, p. 25.

[30] Ibid., p. 25.

[31] J. Duran-Cerda, Teatro chileno contemporañeo (Mexico: Aguilar, 1970). All subsequent quotations are from this edition for the play, "El cepillo de dientes" by Jorge Díaz, included between pages 424-498. Page references are cited in the text, the first references coming from p. 439.

[32] O. G. Revzina and I. I. Revzin, "A Semiotic Experiment on Stage: The Isolation of the Postulate of Normal Communications as a Dramatic Device," Semiotica, 14 (1975) 245-268, p. 260.

[33] E. Ionesco, Théâtre, (Paris: Gallimard, 1954). We quote from La cantatrice chauve, pp. 15-33. All subsequent quotations are from this edition and page references are cited in the text.

[34] O. G. Revzin and I. I. Revzina, "A Semiotic Experiment on Stage: The Isolation of the Postulate of Normal Communications As a Dramatic Device," Semiotica, 14 (1975) 245-268, p. 250.

[35] R. Swanson, "Ionesco's Classical Absurdity," in The Two Faces of Ionesco by R. C. Lamont and M. J. Friedman (New York: Whitston, 1978) p. 145.

[36] H. Blocker, The Metaphysics of Absurdity (Washington: University Press of America, 1979) p. 108.

[37] M. Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (London: Penguin, 1980) p. 283.

[38] D. L. Hirst, Tragicomedy (London: Methuen, 1984) p. 113.

[39] B. Babcock (ed.) The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972) p. 137.

IV. Conclusion: Recovering the Absurd

Post-Second World War developments in the theater have followed a general orientation away from the dominant elements of dramatic structure. The Theater of the Absurd represents a radical breach of the classical forms of dramatic construction which is manifested in a clear disregard for Aristotle's dicta. In the Poetics, Aristotle defines tragedy and its components: plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle and melody. The classical conception of plot was distorted in Witkacy's plays of the 1920s and abandoned in the absurdist plays of the 1950s and 1960s. The concept of character as an embodiment of a high moral purpose has become obliterated in the Theater of the Absurd. The most drastic changes have occurred in the domain of language. In Antiquity, language was elevated; in the bourgeois theater, it was the main vehicle for the expression of moral and psychological concerns; in the Theater of the Absurd, it has become devalued and reduced to incoherent babblings which deny a possibility of true communication. The philosophical content of an absurdist play is presented in terms of visual images showing the anguish and helplessness of modern man in his endeavors to grasp an incomprehensible world. It is interesting to note a growing importance of spectacle and melody in absurdist plays manifested in the frequent appearance of pantomime and vaudevillan elements.

The plays of the Theater of the Absurd also reflect another disregard for Aristotelian tenets; namely, the disregard for the three unities. The unity of action demanding that the action begin and end at definite points and follow in a cause-and-effect sequence has ceased to exist. The action in absurdist plays tends towards inertia instead of a meticulous presentation of events leading to the climax and reversal. This lack of action reflects man's inability to act in real life. The unity of time loses its significance expressing doubt for the continuity of self over time. The unity of place, on the other hand, seems to be observed in the majority of plays of the Absurd which, through the monotony of their surroundings, draws attention to the _marasme_ and sterility of life.

Aristotle's theory deals with tragedy defined as an imitation of a serious action, in dignified language, leading through pity and fear to catharsis of emotions. The plays in the absurdist tradition do not imitate a serious action; the action _per se_ is rarely present and language is definitely not dignified. G. Steiner in _The Death of Tragedy_ (1961) argues that the genre ceased to exist because faith in God and in the greatness of the human soul have disappeared. As a result, moral apathy and emotional atrophy tend to dominate the predicament of man which, in turn, diminishes man's acting potential. Modern tragic vision incorporates comic elements into man's quixotic quest for lost absolutes and dwells mainly on tragicomedy which has become a reigning genre in the Theater of the Absurd.

The pattern of subversive aesthetics of the Theater of the Absurd was woven by consummate iconoclasts: A. Jarry, G. Apollinaire, S. I. Witkiewicz and A. Artaud. They initiated a separation of drama over mimetic principles and, most importantly, they insisted on overthrowing the absolute reign of Logos. They advocated the increased use of visual elements in the performance and the depsychologization of actors' performance. This was their response to the trends of their time: the domination of the word in the theater and the theories of the actor's meticulous identification with his role as advocated by Stanislavski. The abrupt change, which was termed irrational, ridiculous and disharmonious with prevailing practice, embodied the characteristics of the absurd. Realism ceased to occupy a central position in theater aesthetics. It is interesting to note that S. I. Witkiewicz, in particular, managed to become a true prophet of the future. He claimed that mankind had come to witness the demise of philosophy and religion which were no longer able to provide answers to fundamental questions of existence. He predicted the rise of totalitarianism which would sweep individuality and freedom away. Guybal Wahazar, the play in which he painted this frightening vision, seemed devoid of any reason to his contemporaries, and some critics went so far as to call Witkiewicz's creations "the reveries of a syphilitic in the last stages of a creeping paralysis." Had "absurd" been popular in the 1920s, the play would not have escaped that label. Both Witkiewicz and Artaud, some ten years later, regarded art, and theater in particular, as the only sword being able to puncture the wall of man's complacency. Therefore, Witkiewicz practised the "perversity of artistic devices" and Artaud advocated the use of "cruelty" in order to make man aware of latent metaphysical issues. Their ideas, completely shocking to their contemporaries, became revitalized in the aesthetics of the Theater of the Absurd of the 1950s and 1960s.

The concerns of the dramatists of the Absurd, however, exceeded the mainly aesthetic preoccupation of their predecessors. Under the influence of existentialism, the seemingly eternal hierarchy of values had been shattered and no substitute was offered. The Philosophy of Nothingness pointed out the separation of thought and reality, the distinctness of every individual's perception of the world and the hostility of the surrounding world, the clash between meaningful attempts to impose some order on the chaos of living experience and the silence of the world frustrating these attempts. The individual, as a result, lost his authenticity, his faith and love. Man is not only unable to find meaning in himself or in metaphysics but, more importantly, his fellow men in society are not capable of providing answers for him either. Arbitrariness of values and the disappearance of meaningful social concepts such as family or friendship, have turned man into an unsuccessful social creature. Having lost his authenticity, man cannot relate to others in order to establish a meaningful contact. One of the main obstacles is the devaluation of language. Language has ceased to serve as a means of communication which, naturally, has led to the growth of alienation. The devaluation of language announces most poignantly the advent of absurdity. All these concerns were of central interest for the dramatists of the Absurd.

It is my thesis that semiotic analysis of the Theater of the Absurd opens new avenues leading to a more complete appreciation of its unique message which is conveyed through the disruption of traditional forms of verbal exchange and visual presentation. Semiotic analysis of an interplay between various sign systems and codes reveals how the absurd pervades various moral, social and psychological concerns through discontinuity and clashes between different sign systems, the emergence of aberrant codes and disjunctive speech, which merely creates an illusion of communication. In the course of my analyses, the visual aspect of absurdist drama turned out to be more persuasive than the verbal in "showing" the predicament of twentieth century man trapped in a world apparently abandoned by reason and hope.

The chapter on "Signs in the Theater of the Absurd" initiates the discovery of the absurdity of the human condition. Ionesco's Le nouveau locataire is a bitter illustration of man's isolation and loneliness. The dialog is quite ordinary but during the dialogic exchanges, the main character is visually immobilized and buried under a heap of furniture. A wall of indifference is built to separate him from the world. The character does not act in the traditional sense of the word; the artificial objects around him do. They show where the pursuit of material acquisition leads and signs pertaining to the Non-Actor category definitely dominate the semiotic landscape. Human contact is literally shown to be impossible. In Solórzano's play, human contact is presented as a "writhing mass." The fluidity of personality is rendered by the actors playing people and objects. The play focuses on man's futile struggle with time and the transitoriness of his existence, while at the same time communicating this logical void. Mrożek dissects social absurdity by showing how the characters are visually stripped of their individuality and freedom. They become indistinguishable. Mrożek's Striptease is the most visually scathing satire on man's concept of freedom in a society which aims to equalize everyone. In The Police he wrestles with the political realities of his homeland. He demonstrates the failure of the socialist system and bitterly illustrates the disappearance of justice from the Polish judicial landscape. In the plays of Ionesco, Solórzano and Mrożek, the characters are unable to comprehend the nature of the imposed phenomena, which points to the omnipresent collapse of reason.

The codes of the Theater of the Absurd uncover other aspects of man's metaphysical wasteland. Both Beckett and Różewicz break taboos by dealing with old age and death. The traditional dramatic action becomes interiorized and culminates in the verbosity of the characters. They continue to talk to avoid the need to think and to assert their existence. Even though the auditory codes pertaining to the "Actor" category are present, words fail the characters and the puto ergo sum formula moves the linguistic codes into the shade. The light is cast not so much on the dramatis personae as on their surroundings. Beckett's and Różewicz's plays dealing with old men emphasize the loneliness and sterility of the characters' lives. Fading sexuality and lovelessness are captured in the image of the old man caressing the female mannequin in Funny Old Man. The interaction of humans and dummies enhances the dehumanization of life and reflects contempt for the old. The most visual presentation of sterility and degeneration occurs in Happy Days and Old Woman Broods. In Beckett's play, Winnie evokes the images of infertility, lameness and stagnation. Nothing happens, the eternal does not change, loneliness surrounds the characters who, being unable to act, continue to talk to give themselves the impression of existence. Verbosity is their refuge.

Różewicz, on the other hand, spins a frightening tale of mankind surrounded by multiplying matter. Garbage, pouring in from everywhere, signifies the artificiality and dubious value of the products of civilization. Logic has also abandoned that landscape: old women bear children, flowers are a source of fear not beauty, and people interact with dummies instead of with people. The plays of Beckett and Różewicz, although still full of words, present the cemetery of metaphysics through visual signs which dominate the auditory ones.

The "Process of Communication in the Theater of the Absurd" illustrates how the dramatists wrestle with language which emerges as a barrier to be broken in each act of expression. The plays display a significant pull toward inarticulate speech leading through a constant tension between verbal and non-verbal elements. Kinesics and paralanguage which ordinarily enhance verbal behavior seem to neutralize or contradict it. Proxemics also seems to amplify the impossibility of establishing a meaningful contact. It insists on preserving the distance usually maintained in meaningful conversation while words are no longer pregnant with meaning. The repetitious aspect of linguistic exchanges conveys the atmosphere of the constant monotony and tragic ennui characteristic of the human condition. The individual has lost his sense of identity and exists only insofar as others perceive and name him. The individual unable to answer questions about his own existence, is also incapable of maintaining a meaningful contact at the level of family, the smallest social institution. This disintegration of the family is forcefully presented in El cepillo de dientes where characters alleviate their metaphysical anguish by playing games which dwell on factual and logical absurdity. Furthermore, the artificiality of current values is shown to contribute to the phenomenon of lovelessness. This inability to love is reminiscent of their inability to reason.

The most interesting aspect of the Theater of the Absurd is its preoccupation with the breakdown of communication. Words rarely communicate or express, they only fail. Language, both as a means of communication and as a conveyor of metaphysical truths, is shown to be degenerated in the plays of Beckett, Pedrolo, Pinter, Díaz and Ionesco. Its communicative value is subverted by endless repetitions, slogans and clichés. The characters manipulate words and exploit the potentialities of language. The devaluation of language culminates in Ionesco's La cantatrice chauve where we witness its literal disintegration into its constitutive elements. Language seems to be divorced from reality and thought. Though the human mind in its ingenuity has created an antidote to the emptiness of life in the form of verbal games, these games bring other kinds of absurdity into play, and through exposing man's inability to establish a successful social contact, render him an unfortunate social creature.

The tragedy of language is not only self-reflexive, but also indicates the metaphysical void which descended upon men and offers verbosity to counterbalance it.

The spectre of the Absurd manifests itself in the following main forms: the decreasing importance of the character, the disruptive presence of humor and the crisis of language resulting in the breakdown of communication. The characters are often subjected to a progressive loss of names, and generic human traits convey a minimum sense of humanity. The physical features, e.g. sight and mobility, deteriorate to illustrate the process of reification and dehumanization of man under the influence of collapsing systems of philosophical, social and religious values. The dissolution of identity and inability to communicate stress the withdrawal from the self and from the other which is a sign of growing solitariness and alienation. The character has ceased to be the centre of interest in favor of a situation in which he is just one of many participating elements. The growing significance of the "non-character" visual aspect of the play represents a major shift of emphasis.

The disruptive presence of humor and the grotesque is another manifestation of the absurd. Comic characters appear in serious scenes and serious characters appear in comic situations; the reversal of their roles is one of the sources of humor in the plays. Such disfigurations alter the perception of the ordinary pattern of roles in the society or family and shed critical light on them. Apart from vaudevillan routines performed by the characters and the proliferation of objects, the most noticeable source of humor springs from the clowning with words and sounds. Proverbs, for example, become perverted to create a comic effect. Humor appears as a powerful ally of the propensity to parody in the Theater of the Absurd which transforms the perception of philosophical, social and political issues of our age. The different kinds of humor contribute to the subversive aesthetics of the Theater of the Absurd.

The most significant change embodied in the Theater of the Absurd is the impoverishment of the verbal resources of drama. The decay of language parallels the decay of other systems of knowledge. The visual elements of drama acquire a new potential of communicating the concerns which originally resided in the domain of the word. The loss of certitudes about life is accordingly rendered by the depletion of the decor, or its absence, visually rendering the meaninglessness of the surrounding world. Absurdity, in this context, is "merely the want or absence of a particular variety of order"[1]; the order which would counterbalance the chaos of living experience. The disintegration of language, the increased significance of the visual aspect of the play, the elements of clowning and fooling all advocate a return to a non-verbal form of theater. The Theater of the Absurd, through its innovative dramaturgy, progresses towards a total emptiness in which characters and plot crumble to nothing, language is not to be trusted and words manifestly fail. It suggests that essential experience is "unspeakable." Therefore, the Theater of the Absurd is filled with silences and pauses which signify absence, isolation and alienation as necessary components of man's predicament. The Theater of the Absurd reflects a regression into silence which dramatizes man's loss of religious and metaphysical roots, skepticism about temporal and eternal laws and human limitations to articulate incomprehensible experience. The absurd, embodied in the pull towards silence and inertia or stasis, seems to foreshadow the demise of drama.

Note

[1] S. Stewart in Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature (Baltimore: J. Hopkins University Press, 1979) argues that nonsense is contingent upon the production of common sense. She points out several techniques of making nonsense or generating absurdity; notably, reversals and inversions, play with boundaries of discourse, play with infinity (repetition, circularity and nonsense causality), the uses of simultaneity and arrangement and rearrangement within a closed field (e.g. parody). The plays of the Theatre of the Absurd exhibit some of these techniques as means of generating the absurd. The quote comes from p. 16.

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